



COMMUNITY, COMMUNITIES:

ENGAGE TO TRANSFORM

EDITORS

PETER HANENBERG

FRANCISCO MENDES-PALMA



UCP
PRESS

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COMMUNITY, COMMUNITIES:

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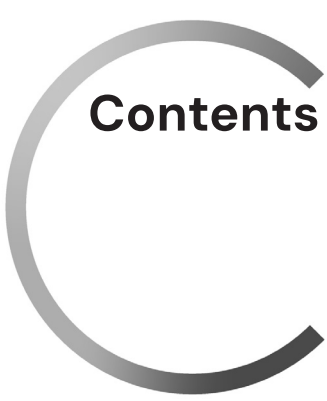
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Preface

Isabel Capelo Gil, Rector of Universidade Católica Portuguesa

Is there a global community? And what is the role of universities.

The idea of community is a fundamental lens through which to understand human interaction and organization across history, extending from religion to politics, from economic systems to legal frameworks, and from social structures to the cultural networks of artists and creatives. Whether in the Christian fellowship of believers, the Muslim ummah, or the civic community of citizens bound together by a shared contract of trust between the governed and their government, the concept of community reflects a deep anthropological impulse toward collaboration, that is part and parcel of human existence.

Universities, in particular, exemplify this principle. They function not only as centres of knowledge production but also as dynamic communities in which diverse individuals – scholars and students alike – converge, exchange ideas, and collectively shape intellectual and social progress. In doing so, they complicate a central tenet of community theory as articulated by Ferdinand Tönnies in 1887, especially his distinction between *Gemeinschaft* – the organic, affective, and ‘natural’ bonds of community – and *Gesellschaft* – the rational, instrumental, and regulated structures of modern society, a reaction to the changes brought about by industrial modernity and its effect on individuals. Universities arguably blur the divide: they institutionalize knowledge through formal structures and rules while simultaneously cultivating shared identities, intellectual solidarities, and forms of belonging that resemble communal ties. In this sense, they do not simply fit within Tönnies’s framework but subtly transform it, revealing how modern institutions can sustain both rational organization and meaningful community.

It is in this sense that the idea of the university as a community – one in which scholars and students work together and “learn to respect,

to consult, to aid each other” (Newman, 2014:101) – has taken deep root within our intellectual tradition. A university is, by definition, a collaborative endeavour: it emerges from the community that surrounds it, cultivates an internal community of knowledge and innovation through the vibrant co-mingling of students and scholars, and, in turn, exerts a formative influence on the wider society in which it is embedded. It also constitutes a comprehensive articulation of diverse modes of knowledge production, whether anchored in disciplinary structures or organized around broader, problem-based approaches.

In this regard, the community of knowledge that arises from the convergence of different perspectives, methodologies, and toolboxes – from physics to theology, biology to literature, sociology to engineering, biotechnology to law – enables the university to act as a powerful agent of societal transformation. The character of the internal academic community profoundly shapes how the wider social community evolves. At the same time, this internal community is never isolated from external forces; rather, it exists in constant interaction with them. Whether at the level of the region, the nation, or humanity at large, the university both reflects and shapes the character and quality of its broader environment, reinforcing the reciprocal relationship between knowledge production and social life.

T4EU represents an alliance of knowledge that is equally a community, grounded in a wide spectrum of shared engagement – educational, scientific, and societal. Each member university, itself a community, contributes organically to the broader impact of a diverse yet interconnected collective endeavour aimed at advancing the common good, fostering growth, and promoting the conditions for a good life. Through this interplay, *T4EU*'s communities enhance the alliance's capacity to act as a powerful instrument for strengthening the fabric of the European community. Yet this impact does not stop at national or even continental boundaries. Because science and education are inherently global endeavours, the alliance ultimately aspires to contribute to the betterment of the global community. This, however, raises an important question: is there such a thing as a global community, and what role can the university play within it?

It has become something of an *idée reçue* to speak of an inevitable global condition. Technological developments have drawn the world closer together, binding us in dense networks of economic, social, political, and

even emotional interdependence. Our lives are continuously mediated by digital connectivity, and events unfold with immediate, shared visibility across the globe. The September 11 attacks reshaped global consciousness, as audiences worldwide experienced shock and grief in unison. Conflicts and wars are no longer confined to regional actors, financial crises reverberate across borders with uneven consequences, and climate change affects all, albeit in profoundly unequal ways.

And yet, this notion of a global condition can too easily become a discursive device that obscures the rich and heterogeneous diversity of human experience. Hannah Arendt perceptively reflected on the mapping of the globe in the wake of European expansion and lamented its consequences. As she writes in *The Human Condition*: “They went to enlarge the earth, not to shrink her into a ball” (Arendt, 1998: 250).

Few terms in academic vocabulary are as charged as “the global.” It signifies both a condition and a strategy; it is a source of anxiety as much as a project of expansion; it expresses a desire for recognition while also implying mechanisms of exclusion. Philosophically, the global recalls what Martin Heidegger described as “the gigantic” (*das Riesige*) – a condition marked by the collapse of distance and the representation of life across unfamiliar and far-reaching contexts. Yet one must be cautious not to efface the very diversity that defines global reality. To invoke the globe without qualification risks reducing the uneven and complex fabric of the world to the weightless abstraction of the balloon globe playfully manipulated by Charlie Chaplin in *The Great Dictator*.

To speak of the global – or to speak for it – is therefore an ethical undertaking that demands attentiveness to difference and a respect for plurality. In this light, cultivating a genuinely global, or international, intellectual ethos becomes a defining responsibility of one of the most resilient institutions in human history: the university. If there is such a thing as a global community, it is not a fully realized, harmonious whole, but rather an ongoing project – fragmented, unequal, and continually in the making. It exists not as a given condition, but as a horizon shaped by human interaction, shared challenges, and the fragile willingness to recognize interdependence across difference.

Universities occupy a uniquely powerful position within this unfinished project. As communities of knowledge, they are among the few institutions capable of sustaining dialogue across borders, disciplines, and cultures while preserving the plurality that defines human experience.

They do not dissolve difference; rather, at their best, they create the conditions under which difference can be engaged critically, respectfully, and productively. In doing so, they challenge simplified notions of the global and instead cultivate a more grounded, reflexive understanding of interconnectedness.

The *T4EU* alliance exemplifies this role in practice. Not merely a network of institutions, it is a community of communities that brings together diverse academic traditions, social contexts, and intellectual approaches into a shared space of collaboration. Its strength lies precisely in this diversity: by fostering meaningful exchange among its members, *T4EU* contributes to shaping a European academic and civic space that is open, dynamic, and outward-looking. At the same time, its ambitions extend beyond Europe, recognizing that the responsibility of knowledge does not end at regional boundaries.

In this light, *T4EU* can be understood as a microcosm of what a global community might become – not a uniform structure, but a constellation of interconnected communities committed to the common good. Its work demonstrates that the global is not achieved through abstraction or homogenization, but through sustained collaboration, mutual recognition, and shared responsibility. The role of universities, and of alliances such as *T4EU*, is therefore not simply to participate in a global community, but to actively build it: carefully, critically, and with an enduring respect for the diversity that makes such a community both possible and necessary.

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Editorial

Peter Hanenberg, Vice-Rector of Universidade Católica Portuguesa

Francisco Mendes-Palma, *Transform4Europe* Coordinator.
Católica Lisbon School of Business and Economics

This book is based on an invitation, an invitation to the academic community of Universidade Católica Portuguesa, to think about itself as a community and as an institution at the service of larger communities. Colleagues from the most diverse disciplines and in the most diverse roles at the University (students, researchers, teachers, staff) have accepted the challenge to write about their understanding of “Community. Communities.”

As editors, we gave only a few hints concerning our own expectations for the topic, mainly a reference to the occasion which led to this project: a meeting of our European University Alliance *Transform4Europe*. The occasion implies an inquiry about where we stand with and within this alliance, in the context of our country, in Europe and concerning the global outreach that we might aim at. This inquiry seeks response in many different ways: as a discipline, as a school, as a facility, as an institution at the service of stakeholders and society at large. None of the texts presented in this book claims to give a comprehensive answer – not even any kind of representative perspective. They stand for a certain view by a certain person in a certain context for a certain moment.

As such, the contributions to this volume have become an invitation themselves, an invitation to the reader to pick up those who might interest most or those which you always were curious about. You might enjoy some of them, others you will not like and there may even be many you won’t even read.

That is what usually happens to books and to communities: you may accept their invitation or not, fully or in part. However, one thing is certain: it is an opportunity to understand where we stand.

As an invitation, the book wants to be a gesture of hospitality: Look, here we are. You are welcome to share with us our *Community. Communities*.

Lisbon, May 2026



Ageing

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Ageing, Community and Belonging: University and the Transversality of Knowledge in the Promotion of Human Dignity

Demographic ageing constitutes one of the most significant social transformations of the twenty-first century, requiring theoretical and practical responses that go beyond fragmented approaches. Contemporary literature consistently demonstrates that community participation and social integration among older adults are associated with positive indicators of well-being, including greater life satisfaction and reduced depressive symptoms. These relationships are mediated by a sense of community and social engagement (Au *et al.*, 2020). Similarly, community environments perceived as more age-friendly are linked to higher quality of life and subjective well-being among older adults (Hsu, 2017). This evidence positions the community not merely as a context for ageing, but as a key determinant of well-being and human dignity throughout life.

Engagement in community activities and the perception of supportive, age-friendly communities promote not only social inclusion but also psychological and social well-being and are associated with higher subjective well-being among older adults, including life satisfaction and quality of life (Hsu, 2017). These relationships highlight the ethical role of the structured and welcoming community environments, reinforcing them as pillars of dignity throughout life.

Treating ageing as a transversal element within the educational project enables universities to respond to demographic and social challenges while enriching their own epistemological frameworks. The ageing process unfolds across complex and diverse dimensions and contexts, requiring multilevel approaches. Nevertheless, the interconnection

between different stakeholders still demands considerable improvement in order to foster a truly integrated and responsive community.

Too often, academic knowledge remains confined within universities and does not fully translate into response to concrete needs emerging from practice, particularly in the field of ageing, where continuous updating is essential. Conversely, the experiential knowledge and daily learning that occurs within social and care organizations is not easily incorporated into academic knowledge production.

The *Transform4Europe* Alliance represents an academic gateway through which these disconnections can be addressed, enabling a more dynamic articulation between knowledge production, professional realities and societal challenges. Within this framework, this vision aligns with approaches emphasizing the construction of age-friendly ecosystems that facilitate community participation through accessible environments, social support networks, and opportunities for meaningful engagement in communal life (Sixsmith *et al.*, 2023).

In this context, we propose a seminar dedicated to the theme of longevity aimed at undergraduate, master's and doctoral students. Considering the age profile and academic background of the participants, the approach will focus less on ageing itself and more on a preventive and forward-looking perspective, emphasising the preparation of younger generations for the growing reality of longer lives. The aim is to raise participants' awareness of the importance of beginning, from an early stage, to build life trajectories that foster well-being, health, meaning and quality of life throughout the entire life course. Inspired by a motivating title such as **"Longevity: How to Live a Long Life?"**, the session seeks to open a dialogue with the concerns and expectations of students and staff. The session will combine short presentations with participatory and light, engaging activities in order to encourage audience involvement and to support an active reflection on life choices, lifestyles and personal projects within a society increasingly shaped by longevity.

Recognizing the university as an integral part of these networks implies conceiving knowledge as a public good co-produced in partnership with the communities in which it is embedded, rather than produced in isolation

within academic walls. Such co-production reinforces the ethical role of academia as a promoter of human dignity and meaningful social participation. This approach also contributes to Integral Human Development in ageing contexts and contributes to mainstream the theme of ageing within organizations (d'Araújo & Nunes, 2025). Intergenerational, culturally active, and socially cohesive communities have been shown to foster conditions conducive to positive ageing, characterized not only by longevity but by quality of life and meaningful participation (World Health Organization, 2020). Reflecting on ageing through the lens of "Community. Communities." thus represents a significant step in this direction, proposing a model of the university as research and learning community committed to human dignity and promoting the construction of broader communities, an imperative in the field of ageing.

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Alumni

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Community: Boomerang of Hope

The University is far more than an institutional structure dedicated to teaching and research: it is a community of knowledge, shaped by shared values and culture, intellectual rigour, and a commitment to the common good. It is within this broader mission that university communities find their deepest meaning.

University communities are, by nature, plural and dynamic. They bring together Students, Faculty, Researchers, Staff, Partners, and the Alumni community, all contributing to the vitality of the academic ecosystem. These communities evolve over time, responding to social change and scientific progress, without losing sight of enduring and convergent values. What sustains them is a shared sense of belonging – the awareness that being part of a university is not confined to a single stage of life but extends across time and experience.

The Universidade Católica Portuguesa was founded upon a vision of higher education that places the human person at the centre of academic life. This vision understands the University as a crossroads where disciplines, generations, cultures, and vocations intersect. Community, in this sense, is not an accessory to academic excellence, but one of its essential conditions. Knowledge flourishes where dialogue is encouraged, where diversity and creativity are welcomed, and where each person recognizes themselves as part of a shared intellectual and human journey.

For Students, the University represents a decisive moment of formation. It is a space where academic knowledge is inseparable from personal growth, ethical reflection, and social responsibility. Student communities – academic, cultural, spiritual, and civic – play a central

role in this process. They are places of learning, collaboration, critical debate, and engagement with the world, enabling Students to develop not only professional competencies, but also a deeper awareness of their responsibilities towards others.

Within this horizon, each Student necessarily becomes an *Alumnus* or *Alumna*. Students enter the University aiming to leave it transformed in multiple dimensions: technical and scientific, human, civic, and intellectual. The status of Alumni is not merely a future designation, but an aspirational horizon that gives meaning to the present experience of university life. From the very first day, Students are invited to consider themselves as part of a living culture and tradition that they will one day carry forward. This perspective reinforces a sense of responsibility, continuity, and commitment, reminding us that the education received is not intended solely for the individual but for the communities they will serve beyond the University.

Alumni are one of the most enduring expressions of the university ecosystem. Far from marking an endpoint, graduation transforms the relationship between the individual and the institution, giving Alumni the awareness that they carry not only academic qualifications, but a formative experience that continues to shape their professional paths, civic engagement, and personal choices. From that moment on, they extend the presence of the University within society, translating its values into concrete action. Frequently, they return to their *Alma Mater* – to seek higher or executive education, to participate in research or mentoring, or to contribute to the University's ongoing development. Alumni are therefore crucial in helping the University improve its present and expand its impact.

The Alumni Community thus expresses an essential movement: what the University offers goes out into the world and returns enriched. Knowledge, values, critical thinking, and openness to others are seeds that, as they bear fruit in the professional and civic lives of Alumni, return to the University in the form of testimony, commitment, service, trust, and hope.

Like a boomerang, the university experience returns with new questions, new knowledge, and renewed hopes, grounded in the same matrix of values believed to have been transmitted during that extraordinary stage of life when consciences are formed and diverse, foundational skill portfolios are developed. It is an age later recalled

with nostalgia – a time when mistakes were part of learning within a safe environment; when classes, readings, and discoveries were spaces for receiving, internalizing, maturing, and questioning, but also moments in which none of us had to be the main protagonist. It is a time of preparation and formation for lives of greater responsibility and leadership.

In post-university life, each *Alumnus* or *Alumna* thus becomes a mediator between the University and society. Upon returning – symbolically or concretely – they bring with them the density of lived experience, the challenges faced, and the maturity acquired. This movement of departure and return is not automatic; it is the result of a carefully nurtured relationship, a cultivated sense of belonging, and a shared awareness of mission. Each time an *Alumnus* returns to the classroom – through the lifelong learning that contemporary life demands – they bring a perspective unique to them: rooted in early adulthood, enriched by professional life, and driven by the pursuit of knowledge and the exchange of ideas that intellectual curiosity and the challenges of new eras impose.

At the Universidade Católica Portuguesa, we are very proud of our Students and Alumni: Cardinals, Nobel Peace Prize laureates, Prime Ministers, Ministers and Government members, politicians, entrepreneurs, and professionals from Arts, Biotechnology, Business and Economics, Education and Psychology, Health Sciences and Nursing, Human Sciences, Law, Medicine, Philosophy, Social Sciences, Theology, and all those whose lives have been shaped by our education across different continents and countries.

For us, our Alumni community is essential to the fulfilment of our mission and *raison d'être*. The diversity of Alumni trajectories – professional, geographical, and generational – enriches the collective identity of the University, creating spaces of mentorship, intellectual exchange, and solidarity. They offer Students living examples of how academic formation can serve society. For Alumni themselves, the awareness of belonging to this community allows them to maintain a living connection to the intellectual and human environment that shaped them, as well as to the repository of memories that preserves meaningful and nostalgic relationships.

The unbreakable bond between the University and its Alumni is founded on reciprocity and shared responsibility, strengthened through dialogue, recognition, and the creation of opportunities for meaningful

participation in academic life. Alumni engagement is most authentic when it rests not merely on institutional loyalty, but on a sustained commitment to the University's educational, cultural, and social mission. In this sense, Alumni do not remain on the margins of the University: they are an integral part of its present and its future.

In a globalized world undergoing rapid transformation, university communities face new challenges and opportunities. Digital technologies have expanded the reach of academic and Alumni networks, enabling connections that transcend geographical and temporal boundaries. Yet these opportunities must be balanced by face-to-face encounters that nurture the essence of community built upon trust, shared purpose, and genuine engagement. Universities are called to create spaces and moments where such encounters may continue to occur and where different generations recognize themselves as part of the same story.

The university community is called to be relational and open, dynamic, challenging, and a creator of trust and reference points – a space where learning is inseparable from care, where belonging is renewed through participation, and where each generation – Students who become Alumni, Alumni who inspire new generations and contribute to the University's development – is invited to receive, transform, and transmit a living and hopeful tradition.

Following Pope Francis (16 December 2020, at the launch of Mission 4.7 and the Global Compact on Education):

"Education is an act of hope. It is a movement toward the future, carried out together, in community, so that knowledge may serve the dignity of every person and the common good."

It is within this continuous movement of departure, return, and giving back – of formation, testimony, culture, and service – that the Alumni Community reveals itself as a true boomerang of hope.



Art

Nuno Crespo is Dean of the School of Arts

Art: Sharing the Common

We never really know how to answer the question: what does one experience in a work of art? Opinions are divided, tastes as well (but, less so since Kant, it is known that if there is anything to discuss, it is taste), and consensus is rare. For some, works of art are places where a time, a memory, a place, or someone is represented; for others, they are materially expressive forms where matter speaks for itself.

Nowadays, the demand for representation and mimesis is no longer central to the ways in which we evaluate, appreciate and engage with art. The history of the development and transformation of art has shown us that, very often, the most important aspect of an artistic gesture is not so much what it says, but how it says it. And the way works of art speak is through the construction of highly complex cultural, symbolic and subjective systems, which not only reflect us, but also reveal things, the world and others in their sensitive, rational and human dimension.

For the art historian Wilhelm Worringer (1881-1965), works of art are composed of a dynamic interplay between abstraction and empathy. In brief, he identifies two fundamental types of art: abstract art, closely linked to the geometrization of the visual and pictorial field (so-called modern art), in which visual forms are not figurative and their relationship, primarily, is with a kind of psychological and subjective need for expression by the artist; on the other hand, Worringer establishes a connection with more figurative and realistic art, because, he says, in this way identification and closeness with the world and its forms are more immediate and empathetic.

However, these two categories only provisionally serve as classificatory principles of art, because when we look closely, all works contain within

themselves a dynamic articulation of those two principles (or, if you prefer, energies). This interplay between abstraction and empathy allows the experience of art to be simultaneously an experience of connection with other humans, nature and the Earth, but also an opening, a path and a possibility of transcendence. Worringer's intuition is fundamental in identifying this mixture present in art, which simultaneously links works to the Earth and opens them to the infinite of transcendence.

These two paths and forces that works of art bring into play are possible because artistic images (here in a broad sense, to include all two-dimensional and three-dimensional images, regardless of their discipline or medium) are places where we react. And the way we react and respond is not only provoked by the material construction that makes up a work of art (there is no art without matter), but also by the way we construct that object: we know we are not passive receivers and we never simply see what is in a painting, in a photograph or in a sculpture, but that the objects of our experience are human, sensitive and rational constructions. And it is this possibility of infinite constructions, infinite experiences, infinite visions that marks the difference and originality of art in relation to all other human constructions. Without that creation made by each of us, a work of art is just another material object in the world.

Therefore, what artists do, even if it is not destined for a specific interlocutor (as Walter Benjamin so clearly saw), always implies the existence of another who can see, hear, read and understand. And it is in this relationship with another, any other and every other, that the experience of art becomes a place for the reconfiguration of human experience of the world and, as Jacques Rancière so well described, the experience of art constitutes the possibility of new ways of feeling and, of course, thinking.

Although our artistic and cultural experiences always relate to a time and a place, there is a vocation (as Kant saw) for a kind of constitution of a shared territory: it is as if the subjects of the aesthetic experience of art formed a temporary community in which everyone shares a voice, a meaning and a feeling. Kant called this element shared by all subjects *sensus communis*. A common sense (which is also a common feeling) that Kant discovered when thinking about the experience of beauty is the idea upon which, Hannah Arendt proposes, a common political project can be elaborated.

Emphasising this sharing of a common sense and feeling serves to highlight how the field of art is a place of community. First, community and intersubjective relationship between the work and its viewer, then between all those who experience the same work. And in works of art it is always this commonality that is shared, which is woven not only from affinities, symbolic, cultural and harmonious sharing, but also from dissonances, disagreements and differences; a place inhabited by different meanings and feelings.

In a digitalised and postmodern world, the new universal in which works of art coexist is not canonical, prescriptive or hegemonic, but a space of openness and agency for infinite individual subjectivities as they manifest themselves in a multiplicity of geographies, cultures and times.

The new commonality we share, for which art is a kind of guardian, is not achieved through repetitions of identical ways of seeing, feeling and doing, but has transformed into an infinity of thoughts, feelings and expressions. And this is the commonality we share in art and, to return to Worringer, which we access through the practice of empathy and the development of the capacity for thought and abstraction.



Biomedicine

Maria José Correia is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Dental Medicine

Community communities: what we can learn from microbes

The idea that microbes are isolated pathogens or merely invisible agents of disease has long been replaced by the understanding that microorganisms form complex, highly structured communities that colonise all known environments and establish interactions with virtually every living organism. Microbial communities and their interactions with the human host are a central object of study in Biomedical Sciences at the Faculty of Dental Medicine of the Universidade Católica Portuguesa. Research on how microbial communities are organised to survive, adapt, and thrive has greatly improved the way we prevent and treat human disease, but it can also provide valuable insights into the fundamental principles that underlie functional collectives in general. We argue that lessons learned from the microbe world might help us create sustainable and resilient communities free from destructive conflict, misinformation and extremism.

One of the most important traits observed in microbial communities is cooperation and division of labour. In many microbial ecosystems, cooperation is essential, and individual species or cells specialise in specific tasks that benefit the whole community. For example, in the oral microbiome, host-derived molecules such as salivary mucins are efficiently degraded by nutritional guilds in which each microbial species produces specific enzymes that target particular components of the molecule. This metabolic cooperation allows several microbial species to survive in the oral cavity even during fasting, when no external nutrients are available (1). For human societies, this highlights the importance of collaboration and specialisation. Complex contemporary challenges

– such as public health, environmental sustainability, or scientific innovation – are addressed more effectively through coordinated efforts in which individuals contribute complementary skills rather than compete to perform identical roles (2).

Efficient communication underlies successful collaboration, and microbial communities communicate remarkably well through mechanisms such as quorum sensing. Through this process, bacteria sense population density and coordinate group behaviours, including biofilm formation, production of virulence factors, or bioluminescence. These actions are initiated only when the community reaches a critical size, ensuring that collective behaviour is effective rather than wasteful. For human communities, this illustrates the importance of information sharing and coordination. Effective communication allows groups to act collectively, make informed decisions, and adapt strategies based on feedback, rather than relying on uncoordinated individual actions. Microbes also show that one way to disrupt a community is by interfering with communication, as illustrated by several examples of quorum quenching (3).

Another major lesson from the living world, and not only from microorganisms, is that diversity increases community resilience. When different species occupy distinct ecological niches and provide overlapping functions (a phenomenon known as functional redundancy) communities are better able to withstand environmental disturbances. If one individual or even an entire species is lost, another may compensate, preserving the overall function of the system. Human societies similarly benefit from diversity in skills, perspectives, and experiences. Diverse communities tend to be more innovative, adaptable, and resistant to social or economic shocks than homogeneous ones (2).

Microbial communities also remind us that competition and conflict are unavoidable aspects of communal life. In microbial ecosystems, competition for limited resources is common, and the production of antibiotics or toxins to inhibit rivals is frequently observed. In the human body, this competition is one of the benefits of maintaining a healthy symbiotic microbiome, as resident microbes can exclude opportunistic and pathogenic species. While competitive behaviour helps structure microbial communities and can benefit the host, it can also lead to destructive arms races in which neither competitor ultimately benefits.

For human societies, this serves as a cautionary lesson. Competition can drive innovation and efficiency, but when it becomes excessive or destructive, it undermines long-term stability and collective well-being. Human societies must therefore regulate competition through ethical norms, laws, and institutions to prevent it from escalating into harmful conflict.

Perhaps one of the most powerful lessons from microorganisms arises from their relationship with their hosts. Humans and their microbiota form a deeply interdependent system, in which both sides benefit when balance is maintained. Microbes gain nutrients and a stable habitat, while the host benefits from metabolic support, immune regulation, and protection against unwanted colonisation. When this balance is disrupted (a state known as dysbiosis) disease may occur. This relationship illustrates the importance of caring for the systems on which we depend. Human communities, like microbial ones, rely on healthy “host environments,” including ecosystems, economies, and social institutions. Exploiting these systems without regard for sustainability risks long-term collapse, a concern clearly emphasised by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*, which calls for care of our common home (4).

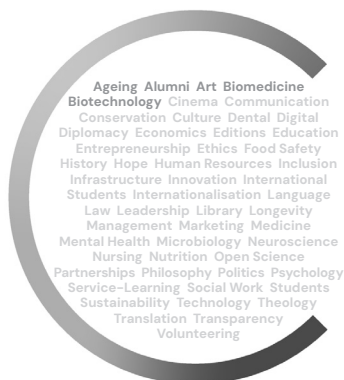
Microorganisms are, quite literally, small actors with an enormous collective impact. On a global scale, microbial-driven biogeochemical cycles demonstrate that large-scale change often arises from the cumulative effect of many small contributions. As a society, and particularly as higher education institutions, we have a responsibility to raise awareness of individual responsibility within collective action when addressing global challenges, such as those articulated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (5).

Not all principles governing microbial communities are positive models for human organisation. Harmful behaviours also exist in the microbial world. Pathogenic microorganisms may exploit their hosts aggressively, causing damage that ultimately threatens both host and microbe. This mirrors unsustainable human behaviours that prioritise short-term gains over long-term stability. Furthermore, microorganisms can rapidly spread harmful traits through horizontal gene transfer, a process that finds parallels in the rapid dissemination of misinformation or destructive social norms in human societies. These examples highlight the need for critical reflection when drawing analogies between microbial and human communities.

Microbial communities provide a rich source of insight into how collective systems function. They teach us the importance of cooperation, communication, diversity, adaptability, and balance, while also reminding us of the dangers of unchecked competition, exploitation, and rigidity. By studying microorganisms not merely as isolated entities but as members of complex communities, we gain a deeper understanding of the principles that sustain life at all scales. Ultimately, microorganisms remind us that thriving communities (whether microbial or human) are built not on individual dominance, but on interconnectedness, balance, and mutual dependence.

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Biotechnology

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From Hive to Biome: A Personal Reflection on Communities of Knowledge, Service, and Transformation

I was born into a hive: thirteen siblings, nonstop voices, and constant daytoday negotiations. If fish do not notice they are wet, I failed to notice how deeply I belonged to my community – how it shaped my instincts, questions, and work. As I moved from family to school, from university to laboratory, and from neighbourhood to international networks, the layers did not replace one another; they accumulated, refracting who I am and what I do.

As a scientist in environmental biotechnology and a university teacher, I share in a community of curious minds. Every hypothesis I give shape to is an echo of the past – papers I read, prior discussions, comments from students that prompted outside-the-box perspectives. Knowledge is not personal property: it is coauthored across time, geographies and worldviews.

In fact, when I come across a socialmedia thread on urban heat islands, or an official report on stormwater, I am changed – whether I agree with those ideas or not. The inputs, large and small, influence the way I approach problems. The laboratory is never a room alone – rather becomes a permanently evolving confluence.

In my research group we develop tools to preserve and restore water and soil: we evaluate pollutant biodegradation, search for bacteria and other microorganisms for biofertilizers, model behaviours, and explore more sustainable alternatives. Now, even this list reads like a map of interplaying communities: from microbiologists to farmers, from engineers to utility companies and municipalities and the anonymous

citizen, all intervene at some point and leave their mark on every final outcome.

Teaching makes these collective dynamics clear in real time. In an Environmental Microbiology class the first priority is not content but connection: sensing the collective pulse, finding a shared rhythm that allows understanding to happen. A lecture becomes a negotiated pathway – who needs an example here, who is ready to be stretched there. Service begins with listening, which is in fact a communal practice. The same dynamic shows up at home, where I catch myself repeating my parents (“so many people are hungry so don’t waste”) and realize that values ripple across decades, more deterministic than any instruction manual. We do not start from a blank page: our life follows a script drafted by others, even as we choose where to place the emphasis.

I choose to emphasize research with, not for, the communities who may give it some use. When testing a biofertilizer growers are invited into the design phase and get prompted for the meaning of “success” in their reality: not just yields, but risk, costs, labour, and trust. When we simulate pollutant degradation we learn about operational constraints directly from water managers. When we write we’re translating, not just between English and Portuguese but across cultural dialects so that results can travel. Making knowledge usable is both technical and relational; it requires a social bond where information can be mutually felt before it can take root.

Cooperating with colleagues in law and management adds yet another dimension of challenges: the policies and market conditions that throttle or catalyse adoption. Can urban green roofs be advanced by procurement guidelines and better building codes? Can socioeconomic assessments anticipate barriers to biofertilizers so that we design for equity and feasibility from the start? Such questions push the work we do at a scientific level to real world implementation and remind me that uptake frequently involves a disconcerting exercise in community relations. Manufacturers, regulators, funders, farmers, and citizens bring ideas together in a way beyond the ideologue’s control.

There is also a quieter but constant kind of nonlinear fluctuation that unfolds in a scientist’s daily life. A student reframes a problem, or a junior colleague asks an odd question, and the whole group shifts direction. These moments rarely make headlines, but I have come to see them as

the beating heart of academia: we are not only generating data; we are shaping those who will shape their own communities.

Since none of us belongs to a single community, each of us is a carrier. I arrive at any meeting already slightly transformed by the previous conversation, newest lab results, or latest email. I leave that meeting with a new alignment for the following junction. No communities are sealed when even a single person moves between them. Culturally we belong to endless communities, unlimited by physical constraints: we are influenced both by those we'll never meet and those long gone, and we will change those we can never know.

The environmental reality raises concrete and urgent issues. Water and soil ignore borders; microbes do not apply for visas. The biotic community – human and otherwise – demands our sense of belonging extend beyond our own species. When I study biodegradation, I learn from organisms whose agency may elude me, yet whose work can help remediate the harms, even if unintended, of human activity. When advocating for green infrastructure we are effectively designing with plants, fungi, and microbes as much as with people. Community is no longer a metaphor: it is the operational truth of all ecosystems.

What began as the noise of a busy household taught me a durable lesson: more than a backdrop to knowledge, service, or transformation, community is the method and vessel where they come to happen. Knowledge is the collective refinement of attention; service is knowledge rendered shareable and actionable; transformation is the long arc of their circulation through linked communities until practices and policies bend. My role – as with any link in a chain – is modest and tentative. But links matter. If I partner with the communities I am in touch with using scientific rigour, humility, and with an eye to the global web, then the hive hums, the tapestry holds, and the biome breathes just a little bit easier.



Cinema

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Cinema as Community

Since its birth, cinema has been an art of community. Contrary to Thomas Edison's Kinetoscope (a peep-hole viewer), the Lumière brothers built a camera and a projector to delight an audience gathered in one place. We can recall the emotion with which the spectators reacted to a train that seemed to break the screen and run into the room. So, cinema was built as a community, and the dark room in which we learned to see films is a place of gathering, of collective emotions and shared experience. Watching films, talking about them, reading the critics, it all fostered a sense of an agora to discuss the crucial matters of our future. Films could change minds (and they also did it in cruel ways when they were used as propaganda) and influence our imagination. Hollywood studios are, in part, responsible for our ways of knowing the world, of loving, of hating, of doing things. For better or for worse, cinema created an imagined community, or, even better said, imagined communities.

Of course, we are now on the verge of profound changes in the way we watch moving images. It seems Edison's revenge came a century later. Nowadays, we mostly consume films, television and other forms of moving images on private devices, cutting the cord of the shared experience of watching simultaneously in the dark room. Cinema always was a heavy technical art, and during its history it went through several revolutions (silent to sound; black and white to colour; better equipment, more portable, more humane; the use of visual effects; and just right now, AI-generated images). So, these transformations also had impacts on the ever-changing way of thinking about cinema as a community.

The history of cinema was also made by communities of cinephiles – people who have a strong love relationship with cinema. The new waves

of the 1950s and 1960s started like that: on the possibility of a shared discussion about cinema, its political and aesthetic ontology. In Portugal, that also happened, and film-clubs were places in which political dissidence was possible. The dictatorship didn't like and chased this collective experience, closing many of these clubs.

This history didn't finish with the rise of television, streaming services, or even with the scrolling screens. It changed. Now, curated neighbourhood cinemas, but also cinemathèques, play an important role in pursuing the construction of communities around cinema. It has been surprising to see how a new generation of viewers is emerging. Even if the experience is necessarily different, the shared ground seems to be important.

Art schools are a type of space in which a community is fostered. Not only in its main events – as film clubs, final project screenings or exhibitions – but, more importantly, inside the classroom. It is in that small space, a simulacrum of the dark room, that a new community of spectators can be born. An artist or filmmaker, a creative or a technician is first and foremost a spectator. It is in that context that we sense the role of the School of Arts of our University. As a space of possibilities, in which students, researchers and professors can discuss cinema, celebrating the shared space of community. It must be, of course, a space of discussion, and sometimes of dissent, but it is in that role that a community – or, for that matter, a school of arts and a university – can teach the citizens of tomorrow.

We know that in the rooms of a school, in that micro-space of our society, it is possible to imagine together, to debate cinema, and consequently, to foster ideas for a shared commons, a life built together, with its beauties and complications.

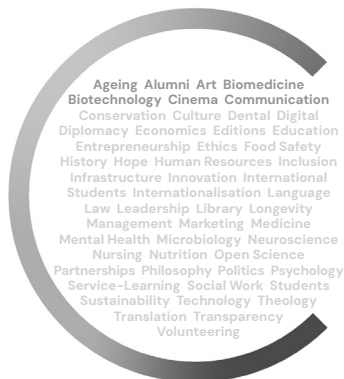
An artist or a filmmaker is someone with a special responsibility in contemporary societies. It is to them that we entrust the voice of the strange, of the new, of that which was once unthinkable. We trust cinema and its makers to be voices that pursue a more dignified world – that is, a community of humans and other beings, sharing together a space of living.

Cinema as community is, therefore, thinking ahead of a time of climate crisis, of the advancement of political agendas that deny *the other*. Cinema as community is the place of encounter against a world of

precarity, war, and lifeless places. Cinema as community is a possibility of what is yet to come.

At our School, at our University, we foster that space, engaging with our local city communities, to build this public arena. It is in that space that the university opens its doors to be confronted with everyday life, with all forms of life that pulsate in the world. We believe in this so strongly that our network is ever expanding, opening itself to the otherness and alterity of other communities, which, at the end, are one and the same human shared common ground.

Cinema as community is, finally, the space of adventure, of defying ourselves, the space to look at the mirror, or behind the window, concepts so dear to film theory. Let us be able, as the Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul so wonderfully proposes, to live together with the ghosts, the animals, the trees around us, being illuminated by fireflies.



Communication

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Media and the Construction of Communities

The concept of community occupies a central position in communication and cultural theory, particularly when examined in relation to the role played by the media in modern societies. Far from functioning as neutral channels for the transmission of information, media actively participate in the constitution of collective identities and collective forms of belonging, shaping the ways in which individuals imagine, experience, and narrate their experience as members of a community. In this short essay I briefly discuss how the media have contributed to the construction of the idea of communities and how this continuous process of construction of a sense of belonging is fundamental to the preservation of the idea of “we” in contemporary societies.

How the Media Create Communities

Benedict Anderson’s seminal book – *Imagined Communities* – challenged essentialist understandings of the concept of nation by arguing that national communities are culturally constructed and don’t emerge naturally from political borders. For Anderson communities are imagined, not due to a lack of real existence, but because members of a national community experience a sense of connection with others whom they do not know personally yet conceive of collectively in their minds. In the author’s own words, “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1983: 6). So, how does one come to feel part of a community of people that he or she doesn’t know? According to Anderson, the media play

a pivotal role in this process by enabling individuals to consume content simultaneously with others who, despite being geographically dispersed, are part of the same social body. Even though his work has been criticized for overfocusing on the role of newspaper capitalism (e.g., Chatterjee, 1986), and the role that printed media played in the creation of national identities, his thesis remains uncontested when it comes to understanding how collective imaginaries are constructed.

Radio, as a mass auditory medium, intensified several of the dynamics identified by Anderson. As argued by Susan Douglas (1999), broadcasting played a crucial role in shaping shared national cultural imagination throughout the twentieth century. By airing entertainment, news, and commemorative events and political speeches, radio created a common soundscape that connected listeners thus cutting across geographic and social divides. What creates the sense of belonging to a community is not merely the simultaneous consumption of the same content but also the emotional dimension of how such content is mediated. This led Douglas (1999) to give particular attention to the radio voice that was intimate and seemingly directed at the individual listener which generated feelings of proximity and companionship. The emotional connection that emerged from the experience of listening was soon exploited by many leaders that found in the new medium a way to bypass newspapers and speak directly to the people. Mussolini and Hitler were particularly successful in this regard, as they capitalized on what was then a novel emotional experience for audiences: the transmission of the leader's voice through the airwaves. Both succeeded in fostering communities unified by fear of otherness and by hatred directed toward those constructed as enemies.

Parallel to allowing individuals to feel part of a community through the sharing of content and emotional experiences, the media became a central mechanism of social integration. During the second half of the 20th century television took a centre stage in this particular by organizing everyday life through schedules, routines, and habitual viewing practices. As Raymond Williams (1974) discussed, this temporal organization contributed to the formation of collective rhythms and shared experiences, reinforcing a sense of belonging among viewers. Broadcasting also allowed for national rituals to reach large audiences. By suspending ordinary programming to broadcasts State funerals, national festivities, royal weddings and other State rituals, the media gather large audiences around these "media events" (Dayan & Katz, 1992). These serve

to reaffirm social order and collective identity, often at the national level, also contributing to the imaginary of national communities.

The sense of unity propagated by the media does not come without problems. Instead, it defines the boundaries of belonging by privileging certain identities while making others invisible, especially those of individuals and groups who are more distant from power structures (Hall, 1997). Even though at the turn of the 21st century we were led to believe that the exclusions operated by the media would come to an end via digital media, this has not been the case. While digital platforms facilitate the formation of communities based on shared interests, values, or political causes, algorithms tend to ensure that the messages that get more attention online are those who are aligned with the interests of the social media business (Pasquale, 2015). So, while these platforms transcend national borders, they also lead to audience fragmentation and introduce new forms of control, visibility, and exclusion, frequently mediated by algorithmic systems. This ultimately contributes to the erosion of social cohesion as people spend more time interacting with information that reinforces what they believe in, while losing the habit of listening to those who think differently. The dangers of selective listening were masterly described by Jacques Ellul (1962: 213):

“Those who read the Press of their group and listen to the radio of their group are constantly reinforced in their allegiance. They learn more and more that their group is right, that its actions are justified; thus their beliefs are strengthened. At the same time, such propaganda contains elements of criticism and refutation of other groups, which will never be read or heard by a member of another group.”

Thus, while the tendency for individuals to engage primarily with information circulated within their own groups predates digital media, the contemporary media ecosystem has amplified the risks of enclosure within informational silos, thereby diminishing individuals' capacity to feel part of broader communities that share common values, hopes, and aspirations, even when they differ in their views on how best to address future challenges. Even so, despite all the transformations in the media landscape, shared narratives, and affective engagement continue to be central to community formation. Live-streamed events, trending topics, and shared online rituals reproduce many of the temporal and emotional

dynamics previously associated with newspapers, radio, and television, albeit in more decentralized and fragmented forms. By facilitating shared imaginaries, structuring collective temporal experiences, and mobilizing affection, media occupy a central role in the formation and maintenance of communities. A nuanced understanding of these processes is therefore essential for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners who seek to promote social cohesion.

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Conservation

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The past as well as specific ancient sites and objects have been replaced and are renewed all the time.

Cornelius J. Holtorf, 2010, p. 130

When writing the word conservation, a frequent typographical error transforms it into conversation. This error is oddly providential, as it encapsulates my central claim: conservation cannot take place without dialogue.

I encountered conservation and restoration in higher education after training in art history, curating, and historical and critical writing on modern and contemporary art, as well as through professional experience in museums and heritage institutions. Entering conservation from this trajectory, I was struck by the epistemological configuration of the field. My approach here is therefore explicitly situated: it reflects a position shaped by movement across disciplinary, professional, and institutional contexts.

Because conservation is anchored in material processes, standardized procedures, and the exercise of a highly regulated profession, it initially appeared to me as fundamentally distinct from art history as I had encountered it within the Humanities. Erwin Panofsky's description of the Humanities was formative in this regard:

"[...] the humanist rejects authority. But he respects tradition [...]
By looking as they do at frozen and stationary records, [...] the humanities attempt to grasp the processes during which these records were produced and became what they are."
(Panofsky, 1989, pp. 16–25)

From this perspective, I understood art history as a critical practice, heritage as a field structured by responsibility and duty, and conservation as a domain governed by procedural rigour and protocol.

This initial perception, however, proved insufficient. Despite their distinct research traditions – one need only recall the long-standing collaboration between conservation, biology, and chemistry – art history, heritage studies, and conservation are bound by structural and epistemological interdependencies. Knowledge of art and heritage is grounded in the results produced by both historical inquiry and conservation practice. Conservation, in particular, provides art history and heritage studies with unique forms of evidence that enhance the reliability of processes such as attribution, dating, and the reconstruction of contexts of production. At the same time, conservation itself has been destabilized by the conceptual and methodological expansion of art history and heritage studies.

As art history, under the influence of visual culture studies, expanded to include photography, cinema, comics, performance, street art, and time-based practices, and as heritage became increasingly ubiquitous – encompassing everyday objects, vernacular architecture, contemporary buildings, cultural landscapes, and intangible manifestations – conservation embraced this expansion as a challenge of its own. It responded with unprecedented plasticity, interdisciplinary crossings, and methodological imports. As Hanna Hölling observes:

“As a complex sum of approaches, attitudes and cultures, conservation rejects any uniformity. Rather, it constantly seeks to define itself at the crossroads of theory and practice, at the point where custody, stewardship, presentation and creativity meet. This is why the question of ‘what conservation is’ seems only at first sight simplistic. In the bigger picture, in balancing between the sciences and the humanities, and artisanal and artistic approaches, conservation both generates and sources distinct types of knowledge to form its identity as a discipline.”
(Hölling, 2017, p. 8)

These fields do not relate hierarchically but dialogically. In conversation, art history, heritage studies, and conservation function in solidarity, each contributing to an understanding of the regimes through which art and heritage are constituted, made legible, and endowed with value. Whether

through material and technical processes, cultural and social mechanisms, institutions of legitimation, or modes of representation, I see these disciplines converging around shared problems and methodological affinities. They also share a critical orientation: an attentiveness to plural voices, a diversification of perspectives, and a resistance to unifying narratives. Panofsky's emphasis on reconstruction and re-creation in art historical work (1989, p. 23), Silverman, Waterton, and Watson's definition of heritage as the activation of the past in the present (2017, p. 8), and Kühl's argument that restoration constitutes a critical act (2016, p. 242) all resonate strongly with my experience of the field.

What has become increasingly clear is that these disciplines have collectively shifted their focus. Rather than seeking ontological definitions – what art is, what heritage is, what conservation is – they now interrogate the effects of their interventions. This is not a pragmatic retreat from theory, nor a capitulation to instrumental rationality. Instead, it marks an explicit recognition of the societal embeddedness of knowledge. This recognition parallels cultural and discursive turns toward agency, participation, expanded value systems, and the continuous construction and revision of meaning. Sørensen and Carman's formulation of the field's objects as things, people, and texts (2009) captured this expanded horizon.

From this perspective, heritage, art, authenticity, identity, and originality appear not as fixed entities but as cultural processes. Consequently, conservation and heritage studies cannot privilege origins or singular historical moments. Conservation practice necessarily involves choice – choices informed by collective interests rather than exclusive visions, and by social considerations as much as technical ones. Such decisions must account for the thickness of time, cultural plurality, nuance, and the inevitability of change. Holtorf's position, cited in the epigraph to this essay, articulates this challenge with clarity.

Yet, translating this epistemological stance into practice remains deeply problematic. In my observation, institutions, heritage administrations, policy frameworks, and everyday conservation workflows often struggle to accommodate the demands of participatory, socially embedded practice. Whose voices are to be heard, and by what means? How can participation be enabled without becoming tokenistic? How are communities of use and heterogeneous stakeholders to be integrated into decision-making? How can funding imperatives be reconciled with

the time required for social engagement? How can public procurement rules be fulfilled while still allowing for sustained research and reflection? Ultimately, what forms of conversation are necessary in order to conserve? The epistemological field of heritage and conservation studies thus informs a committed and critical practice and intersects with an expanded ethics: one that cares for cultural assets, attends to social relations, affirms a culture–nature continuum, and considers the conditions of a sustainable future. In this context, the role of the conservator – and the frameworks guiding conservation decision-making – necessarily shifts. As Henderson and Ashley argue:

“Like any other heritage professional, the conservator may be ignorant of the social impact of their decisions. A narrow framing of the task and outputs, especially a technical framing, allows a reductionist assessment of conservation practice that fails to recognise that any ‘care’ given to the heritage is only a good outcome if there is a consequent care for the people for whom that heritage matters.

Understanding the past and working toward the future are both active, evolving processes rooted in the present. [...] While existing decision-making models in conservation have value, we must do more to address dynamic complexity and move beyond the illusion of a fixed past or a predictable future. Systems thinking helps us embrace this complexity.”

(Henderson & Ashley, 2025, p. 324)

From this perspective, the slippage between *conservation* and *conversation* is more than a typographical accident. It marks a methodological and ethical reorientation: from fixing the past to negotiating futures; from authoritative intervention to shared decision-making; from an ideal of permanence to an acceptance of transformation as intrinsic to care. The typo, in this sense, becomes diagnostic – revealing both the depth of ongoing change and the challenges that this change continues to pose.

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Culture

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Culture is, first of all, a set of practices shared by a group of people based on the affordances of their environment

In my early days in Portugal, during a fine (and expensive) dinner, a colleague of mine asked me to taste several wines to tell which one we should choose. To be honest, many of them just tasted like wine to me. It would not have made a difference for me to choose one or the other – except concerning the prices, maybe. But my colleague got very excited about one of the wines, whereas he clearly and definitely rejected others. At that moment, I felt like not being part of the community. Coming from a culture where people drink beer and not wine, I was not only unable to participate in the conversation, but I also didn't even know or feel what the whole issue was about. My senses had not been trained sufficiently in the task of comparing or even distinguishing better wines from worse. And as the reader might have noticed, I mixed other criteria into the experience – like the 'economic' consequences of the decision I would make. Which did not really help to be clear on the quality of the wine.

This little scene represents in a nutshell the relation between culture and community. Culture is, first of all, a set of practices shared by a group of people based on the affordances of their environment. By sharing these practices, the members of the group acquire certain notions, concepts, preferences and competencies which they want to make sure to reveal to new members or even to those who do not belong to the group. Such shared practices depend on the availability of certain material conditions (no grapes, no wine), and these material conditions are subject to specialised practices so that minds, things and working with and benefiting from them cluster to an astonishing inseparability.

Cultures produce artefacts through which mental and social options can be expressed, represented or simply performed. Culture is the expression, the practice, the confirmation and the project of a community as a mental (the individual), a social (the group) and a material (the things) endeavour.

In this sense, there are certainly many cultures around the world – as many as there are groups willing to share practices and notions under certain material conditions. Nevertheless, it is also certain to say that culture is probably the most universal feature of the human being. In an evolutionary perspective, it is culture which has helped the human being to compensate its natural limitations. We are cultural by nature – and thus there cannot be any human being and certainly no human community without culture.

The way we feel, think and behave is grounded in the natural conditions and the cultural origins of human development. Without its cultural content, the human brain is empty. Acquiring, practising, and sharing notions, concepts and techniques make up “a whole way of life” as defined by Raymond Williams, one of the founding fathers of the Study of Culture in the 20th century.

In German, there is a special word to describe the process through which culture comes into life: *Bildung*. The word can be translated into both education as the process and culture as its result. You need education (which means learning more than teaching) to be part of a culture – or to say it in the German way, “to have” culture. As I have not been taught to appreciate wine (to have a notion of its qualities and eventually of certain preferences), I am not able to really participate in the wine culture. And on the other hand: Though my colleagues do not use the word “Bildung” in their language, they still engage fully in the *Bildung* of a wine culture.

Culture is what you know, even when you cannot tell it – to use a famous expression by Michael Polanyi. In this sense, culture is widely made by tacit knowledge which conditions our thoughts and behaviour in a way that seems natural to us – and eventually strange to others. As culture comes along with certain notions, concepts and techniques, it frequently promotes preferences, biases and stereotypes. And especially so, when we are trained to believe in a certain hierarchy of cultures.

Who would not tend to say that a wine culture is more sophisticated than a beer culture? Who would not agree with the observation that the

art of producing a good wine is nevertheless not at the same height as composing a symphony? Certainly, some readers of these lines would in fact disagree with either assumption, though others might agree, just in any case relying on the tacit preferences of their education and culture. And hopefully, none of them would judge the others for the choices they make.

However, the history of cultures has been a long history of judging, establishing hierarchies and seeking conflicts. Cultures not only build communities, but they also separate them. Specially so, since an unfortunate 19th century started to force the concepts of culture and nation (and language) into a tragic interdependence. Though there are only a very few examples of countries in which nation, culture and language build, in fact, a unity (as is the case of Portugal), the identification of the concepts of culture and nation continues to be predominant in the debate. As this identification frequently comes along with claims of hierarchy, belonging, civil and civic rights, it represents a terrible risk to the establishment of mutual respect and social peace. The European Union and the European University Alliances like *Transform4Europe* are outstanding examples of a new concept of culture to which diversity is not a threat but an opportunity.

Today, after years of sharing the practices of a wine culture, I have learnt to choose my wine myself. In the end, I have not been condemned to stick forever to my acquired tacit knowledge and preferences. That is the best you can say about culture and community. You can always learn to appreciate them and to be part of them: as long as you engage in a continuous process of cultural learning. The community itself will not stay untouched by such learning – as itself changes in the adaptation to new challenges, needs and affordances, involving the whole community in the human commitment to its *Bildung*.

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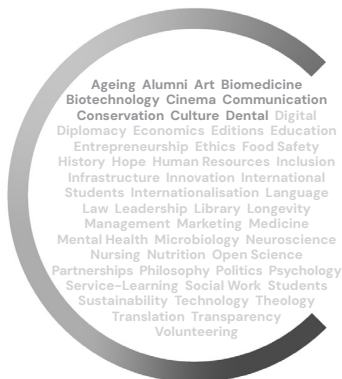
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Dental

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Beyond the Clinic Walls: A Mosaic of Smiles and Science

The morning air in Viseu carries a certain stillness, but inside the labs of the Faculty of Dental Medicine at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa (FMD-UCP), there is a palpable sense of urgency. For those of us within these walls, the university has never been just a place of lectures and exams; it is a bridge between scientific knowledge and the pressing needs of Viseu region. As we look toward the *T4EU Week 2026*, themed “Community. Communities”, we are reminded that our role is to empower these very groups, transforming lives through a shared journey of health and solidarity.

The Lab That Went to the Field

I remember the peak of the pandemic – a time of silence and isolation. At CIIS (Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in Health), the challenge was clear: how do we keep our community safe? We responded to a call by the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) in March of 2020 for solutions, and by May, our team was deep into developing the first saliva-based diagnostic test for COVID-19 in Portugal.

Imagine the relief of a young athlete or a student who, instead of the dreaded invasive swab, could provide a simple saliva sample. It was non-invasive and didn't require the scarce medical staff of the time for collection. We developed a methodology that allowed us to test up to 20 people with a single test, drastically reducing costs. This wasn't just ‘research’; it was the reason thousands of young people could keep playing sports and attending classes. When our work eventually helped shape national health policies through the DGS (Direção Geral de Saúde),

we realised the true power of being “knowledge entrepreneurs” – turning a lab breakthrough into a societal lifeline.

Lessons You Can’t Learn in a Textbook

Step away from the high-tech diagnostic tools, and you might find our students in a local primary school, a nursing home or a social support centre. Through projects like Educar a Escovar or Sorrisos Maiores, the classroom or the nursing home expands to include the entire city.

A dental student, perhaps nervous about his or her first community outreach, sits down with a child or an elderly resident at the Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Viseu. In that moment, the technicalities of periodontology or endodontics take a back seat to human connection. The student isn’t just checking teeth; they are encountering the reality of health inequalities. They learn to listen, to empathise, and to respect the diverse contexts of those they serve.

This is where the transformation happens. As these students collaborate with partners like Cáritas Diocesana de Viseu or the Ordem Soberana e Militar de Malta, they evolve from clinicians into agents of positive change. They understand that a “better community” is built one smile at a time, through projects that span all ages – from *Ser Criança* to *Sorrisos em Movimento*.

The Digital Horizon and the T4EU Vision

Our mission at FMD-UCP is anchored in three pillars: Teaching, Research, and Social Responsibility. However, as we look to the future, these pillars are being reinforced by the digital revolution. The inauguration of the Centre for Digital Teaching in Dental Medicine (CED-MeD) in 2023 marks a new chapter where innovation meets tradition.

The upcoming *T4EU Week* in May 2026 will be the culmination of this spirit. It is an invitation to join our “Community of Communities” – environmental, digital, and societal. We are moving toward a model where active methodologies and digital tools allow us to generate an even deeper, more lasting impact.

At the end, the university is not an ivory tower. It is a living organism that thrives when it breathes the same air as its neighbours. Whether we are validating a new diagnostic test or teaching a child how to brush their teeth, we are fulfilling a promise: to be present, to empower, and to build a better common life together.



Digital

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When Real People Use Digital Technologies to Create Synthetic Communities

The Cambridge English Dictionary selected a peculiar word as its “Word of 2025”: *Parasocial*. A parasocial feeling or relationship involves the one-sided, illusory sense of intimacy, friendship, community, or attachment to a person whom we have never met, like a celebrity or online influencer, or someone who might not even be real, like an Artificial Intelligence (AI) chatbot “companion.” According to the editors of the Cambridge Dictionary, the choice of “parasocial” as the word of the year is a sign of how pervasively digital technologies like social media and AI are impacting deep human longings for social connection and community: “As social media intensifies the intimacy that fans feel with their adored celebrities, and with the rise in popularity of AI companions that can take on personalities, the word for these one-way relationships – *parasocial* – is having its own moment.”¹

Humans are, by nature, social animals. We only develop our human capacities for language, thought, and action in community with other human beings – in families, friendships, classes, work groups, clubs, sports teams, churches, artistic and intellectual communities, and political societies. Aristotle, in perhaps the greatest and most influential philosophical treatise on friendship (his word is *philia*, which is broader than our contemporary term “friendship,” and includes family ties and civic associations), tells us that “Friendship is one of the most indispensable requirements of life. For no one would choose to live without friends, even if they possessed everything else that is good.” From birth onward, a caring community is an essential element

1 See Cambridge English Dictionary online: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/editorial/word-of-the-year>

of human wellbeing, or the good human life, without which we remain forever unfulfilled.

Alas, numerous scholars and public health authorities, including the World Health Organization, hold that many of us are living through a “crisis” of loneliness and social isolation. This is true not least in Europe, where, according to one study, most young people between 18–35 years of age report being moderately or severely lonely, and where ageing populations are expected to face growing risks of isolation and loneliness.² What’s the role of digital technology and parasocial relations in this dynamic?

More than a decade ago, Facebook (now Meta) appropriated the word ‘friend’ to describe the digital interconnections the company’s platforms provided, which functioned as means for the company to harvest personal data for targeted advertising. We all know that ‘friends’ on Facebook may have no connection to friendship in the fundamental human sense. A Facebook friend could be merely instrumental, or even predatory, or a mindless bot. If you grew up thinking that a ‘friend’ is just what the term means on Facebook, you would be profoundly confused about the possibilities – and the valuable qualities – of deep human social connection involving mutual care, respect, and understanding.

But the situation is more concerning than merely a matter of confusion about what terms like “friends” and “community” mean in a digital era. Back when Facebook first started calling the digital connections on its platform “friends,” there was great optimism for the power of social media to foster community, strengthen democracy, and build more connected and convivial world. Empirical research has found screen-based digital interactions, and interactions across social media platforms in particular, are related not only to increasing social polarization, but also to a striking rise in loneliness, anxiety, and decline in the skills of face-to-face social relationships, especially among young people.³ Critics like the social psychologist Jonathan Haidt, the former Google

2 See “From loneliness to social connection – charting a path to healthier societies: report of the WHO Commission on Social Connection.” Geneva: World Health Organization (2025). See also: Maïke Luhmann, Bernd Schäfer, Ricarda Steinmayr, “A Comparison of Youth Loneliness in 2024,” Ed. Bertelsmann Stiftung, Gütersloh (2024); and Veronica Sandu, Eszter Zólyomi, Kai Leichsenring, *Social isolation and loneliness among older people in Europe – Evidence, policies and interventions*. Vienna: European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research (2022).

3 Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* (New York: Penguin Press, 2024).

engineer Tristan Harris, and business professor Adam Adler, argue that design decisions by technology companies like Facebook's "like" button and Instagram's "infinite scroll" feature are deliberate attempts to foster behavioural addiction to digital platforms, not unlike the addictive design of machine gambling, often with disastrous consequences for actual human community and well-being. Digitally mediated (and monetized) connections are not just new means of relating socially – not just new tools for doing the same thing we did before. Rather, digital technologies can change the nature of our interactions with others and influence the kind of people we become through these digitally-regimented interactions. And the results are concerning.

The next – and far more radical – stage in the digital transformation of human community is the introduction of AI agents as "social" actors in our everyday lives. We now have generative AI chatbots, based on Large Language Models (LLMs), capable of realistically simulating human language, generating lifelike computer voices, reading and mimicking human emotions, and covertly influencing human beliefs and decision making. Generative AI models leverage vast amounts of computational statistics to impersonate human language patterns and forms of social interaction, even mimicking specific human personalities. AI companies including Meta, xAI, Luka, Character.ai, and many others, are leveraging generative AI to sell humanlike AI "companions" to the public – AI chatbots that imitate human coaches, therapists, friends, religious mentors, and intimate romantic partners. These interactive chatbots can be combined with computer-generated voices and humanlike visual avatars, creating an even more immersive virtual experience of social interaction. By some estimates, hundreds of millions of users, including one third of American teenagers, already turn to AI for synthetic experiences of companionship, emotional support, and love.⁴

The point of AI companions is to comfort and entertain us, and to soothe painful feelings of loneliness, rejection, and grief. There are some indications that they help particular users feel better.⁵ Since they are trained on text comprising nearly the entire internet, and fine-tuned to

4 Michael Robb and Supreet Mann, "Talk, trust, and trade-offs: How and why teens use AI companions," Common Sense Media report (2025). Jamie Bernardi, "Friends for sale: the rise and risks of AI companions," The Ada Lovelace Institute report (2025).

5 Julian De Freitas, et al., "AI Companions Reduce Loneliness", *Harvard Business School Working Paper*, No. 24-078 (2024).

sound caring and supportive, AI companions can simulate the outward language of community, care, friendship, and love. Perhaps the most unsettling form of ersatz AI-enabled digital community is a continued community with the dead, via specially trained chatbots called “ghostbots” or “griefbots.” Ghostbots are trained to imitate specific deceased people. They can create the illusion that the dead loved one is, in some sense, still there for you.

But appearances can be deceiving. AI simulations of people are not people. They do not mean what they say (in a human sense) when they tell you they ‘understand’ or “believe” in you. They do not freely choose to interact with humans, they do not feel delight or arousal in interacting with us, they do not miss a human user when she is away, nor do they grieve if and when a human user dies.⁶ They do not, in short, *care* about us, like a true friend or lover would. Unfortunately, interacting with AI companions can create a compelling illusion of recognition and care, and this has led some vulnerable users into greater isolation, delusions, or even self-harm, and suicide.⁷

Just as important, though less widely understood, is the fact that a human user cannot really care about an AI companion, like a true friend. This is because an AI companion is a software product engineered to *satisfy the user* – i.e., it does not have a life of its own, it does not make demands on you, and (in principle) will never reject or leave you. And that’s part of the appeal. AI systems are made to serve human interests without having a “good” of their own. You can dedicate yourself to the good of your friends and your community, but not the ‘good’ of an AI companion.⁸

Many users find that interacting with AI companions is more convenient (and lower-risk) than forming relationships with real people. Interacting with AI instead of other people to meet our social needs might have a serious impact on us: it may warp our expectations, undercut our

6 I make this argument in my forthcoming article “Does Your Virtual Companion Miss You? Human–AI Relationships, Language, and Ethics,” in Richard Wood, Ian Marcus, Jonathan Teubner eds., *The Common Good in the Age of AI* (forthcoming)

7 Yutong Zhang, et al., “The Rise of AI Companions: How Human–Chatbot Relationships Influence Well-Being,” *arXiv* (2025). Iason Gabriel, et al., “The Ethics of Advanced AI Assistants,” Google DeepMind report, *arXiv* (2024). Miles Klee, “People are Losing Loved Ones to AI-Fueled Spiritual Fantasies,” *Rolling Stone* (May 4, 2025).

8 Micah Lott and I make this argument and explain its ethical implications in our paper, “With Friends Like These: Love and Friendship with AI Agents,” *Topoi* (2025).

social skills, make us more polarized, and lessen our motivations to form genuine communities. This would make us feel less lonely but, at the same time, isolate us further from one another.

Because real community is such a foundational human need, it is crucial that we employ digital technologies in ways that do not weaken our social ties of mutual care. AI simulations of people will get ever more lifelike and realistic. But they cannot provide genuine community, precisely because they are digital artefacts that have been engineered to serve us, as consumers, akin to synthetic slaves or humanlike tools. The living bonds of mutual friendship, love, and community that contribute to a fully human life transcend this instrumentality. Community cannot be substituted, nor loneliness 'solved' with a new app or algorithm.



Diplomacy

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Communities and Diplomacy: The University as Anchor and Choreographer of Knowledge

A university is not simply an institution of teaching and research; it is a living organism naturally formed by communities. Students, professors, researchers, alumni, staff, and partners all contribute to its vitality. The University anchors these communities by offering continuity, values, and a shared mission. It is at once a moral compass, an intellectual framework, and a social hub. Rooted in universal values, it provides dignity, solidarity, and openness as foundations for all communities. Through teaching, research, and dialogue, it empowers them to innovate while ensuring that creativity remains ethically grounded. By engaging with local and global partners, it extends its mission outward, connecting internal communities with external ones and positioning itself as a hub of outreach. In this way, the University stabilizes, connects, and inspires, ensuring that communities are not fragmented but interwoven into a larger fabric of belonging.

Because the University is naturally formed by communities, these are the heartbeat of its identity. Communities are dynamic ecosystems where values, traditions, and aspirations converge. They provide belonging and solidarity, transforming individual initiatives into collective achievements. Within the University, communities overlap and interact: students bring energy and creativity, faculty contribute memory and rigor, researchers generate innovation, and alumni extend values into society. Together, they form a “community of communities” – diverse yet united, rooted in tradition yet open to renewal. Communities also embody continuity across time. They preserve heritage while cultivating resilience, ensuring that wisdom and responsibility are passed on to new generations. In this way, communities are both spaces of memory and laboratories of the future.

Diplomacy emerges naturally from the way communities function within the University. It is not an external addition but an internal practice that enables communities to thrive. Where communities bring diversity of perspectives, diplomacy provides the language of dialogue, negotiation, and cooperation. It is the art of building bridges across differences – cultural, disciplinary, or generational – and it transforms diversity into a resource, turning potential conflicts into opportunities for collaboration. Within the University, science diplomacy ensures that communities remain cohesive, respectful, and innovative. Diplomacy also extends outwards. Through alliances, exchanges, and partnerships, the University represents itself as an ambassador of knowledge and values. Symbolically, diplomacy is expressed in rituals and traditions that communicate belonging and identity. In this way, diplomacy is both internal and external, both practical and symbolic – always enabling communities to flourish.

This natural flow – University, communities, diplomacy – is enriched by a vision of knowledge as choreography. To speak of choreography is to evoke the coordination of diverse elements into a shared rhythm. Knowledge, in this sense, is not static but dynamic, a dance of ideas, disciplines, and perspectives. The University, as choreographer, guides this movement, ensuring that communities interact in ways that generate harmony rather than discord. Anchoring provides stability; choreography adds creativity and direction. Together, they allow the University to inspire a movement towards fulfilment for all, where knowledge is lived as a shared practice of harmony.

This metaphor deepens the University's mission. Communities are not isolated groups but dancers in a larger choreography, moving together in dialogue, collaboration, and creativity. Diplomacy is itself a kind of community – the rhythm of negotiation, the gesture of empathy, the step of cooperation. Without diplomacy, the choreography would falter; with it, communities move together towards shared futures. To choreograph knowledge is to place the human person at the centre of this movement, ensuring that harmony serves dignity and fulfilment.

As anchor of "Community. Communities," the University also enhances contemporary strategic focus areas that define our era. By aligning its mission with societal transformation such as digital advancement, or environmental sustainability, it demonstrates that communities and diplomacy are not abstract ideals but practical forces for change. The University empowers communities to address inequality, migration, and

cultural shifts with creativity and resilience, while diplomacy ensures dialogue and civic renewal. It anchors communities in digital literacy and innovation, ensuring that technology becomes a vehicle for ethical collaboration and interdisciplinary research. It also anchors communities in ecological responsibility, making sustainability a shared value and practice, while diplomacy fosters collaboration across borders to protect our common home. In all these areas, the University acts as a space of knowledge entrepreneurship, cultivating leaders who see knowledge not only as an academic pursuit but as a creative force for societal transformation.

The metaphor of choreography adds density to this vision. Societal transformation is not a random process but a carefully choreographed movement where communities act in harmony to renew civic life. Digital advancement is not chaotic innovation but a choreography of tools and values, ensuring that technology serves human dignity. Environmental sustainability is not isolated activism but a choreography of responsibility, where communities and diplomacy move together to protect the planet. In each case, the University is both anchor and choreographer, stabilizing values while guiding movements of renewal.

The emphasis on communities and diplomacy is not only strategic but transformative. It reshapes the way institutions understand themselves and their mission. Communities remind us that belonging and solidarity are essential for human flourishing. Diplomacy teaches us that dialogue and cooperation are the keys to navigating diversity. Together, they prepare individuals and institutions to face the complexities of the modern world with resilience, creativity, and hope. By integrating communities and diplomacy into institutional life, universities foster a culture of creative knowledge entrepreneurship and civic renewal. They become places where tradition and innovation meet, where differences are embraced as opportunities, and where individuals are empowered to lead with empathy and vision. Above all, the University stands as the anchor and choreographer of this vision – stabilizing, connecting, and empowering communities while guiding them toward shared futures that are inclusive, innovative, and sustainable.



Economics

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A core contribution of Economics to public decision-making is a concept of efficiency

Economics has been called a *dismal science* since the late nineteenth century. The name is intuitive. There are not enough resources to satisfy all our material needs and the allocation of scarce resources between competing needs is the main subject of Economics. Not surprisingly, economists often produce recommendations that dismay at least some of the interested parties.

Nowadays the problem of scarcity is more acute. For present-day generations the extinction of species, overfishing, environmental depletion and climate change, according to the scientific consensus on the origins of global warming, require actions that were not considered in the nineteenth and for most of the twentieth centuries. In Victorian times, scientists even argued that the fish was so abundant that it was enough for everyone who could catch it.

To address scarcity, a core contribution of Economics to public decision-making is a concept of efficiency. Another is the argument that competitive markets are the most appropriate way to promote efficiency. The Kaldor-Hicks concept of efficiency, which currently predominates in welfare economics or in the economic theory of regulation, has been accepted by legislators in many areas, such as sectoral regulation, competition policy, and public policy. However, there are reservations about its use. One is based on the dependence of the concept of efficiency on the income distribution of the society under analysis. We get the idea, but it doesn't invalidate the criterion. The efficiency criterion requires the decision-maker to look at the impact of their decision at the society where it will be imposed, as it exists, and not at an ahistorical

alternative. The absence of mandatory compensation is another source of reservations, which must also be kept in mind, but without invalidating the criteria, especially since in practice the absence of compensation may result from the impossibility of estimating the value of the damage suffered by each one.

When dealing with unique resources, e.g., some environmental resources, the concept of efficiency is less useful, as it does not take into account the interests of future generations. There are alternative criteria in the economists' toolbox, such as sustainability or the precautionary principle, the latter enshrined in the Treaty of Lisbon. The application of this criterion in the policy response to risks of systemic financial crisis, or natural or geopolitical catastrophes is arguable.

Recently, behavioural economics has relativized the economic concept of efficiency, because the hypotheses of unlimited rationality implicit in it do not fit the way people behave. Thus, the way has been paved for new public policies, e.g., to promote savings and consumer protection. But, colliding with the principle of consumer sovereignty, it incentivizes the paternalism of the State. In this context, it is worth remembering that the economic analysis of the political process highlights the risk of political opportunism and the costs that result from it. It is not guaranteed that the political process will result in a benevolent State.

There are various robust explanations about the social benefits of competitive markets, from the first theorem of welfare economics, valid under very restrictive conditions, to the general defence of the market as a process of information discovery, in the Austrian tradition, or to historical evidence.

At the same time, it is well-known that markets are often inefficient, there are market failures, which provide a rationale for government regulation. As a matter of fact, government regulation is an indispensable condition for the market economy. Moreover, state intervention predates the very idea of the market, because without a legal framework defining property rights, the rules to be complied with by the agents, and the police and courts that enforce them, a market economy is not viable.

The market economy creates many areas of discussion between economists, public decision makers and other interested parties. One is to define the activities that should be excluded or included in the market. At stake is a social decision, not an economist's decision.

Do we accept the existence of a market for psychotropic substances? Or human organs? Tobacco was once recommended for health reasons and now it is on the threshold of illegality also for health reasons, well-founded now, unlike before. A little more than 200 years ago, a movement began to abolish slavery, and the corresponding markets, that nowadays most people would consider the most repulsive markets in the history of human activities.

Having said that, economists are not neutral about the market, if an activity is recognized as legal. Typically, they defend that it is the best way to organize the activity, and they have made remarkable contributions to the creation of new markets. Wholesale electricity markets provide a recent successful example. Another is the creation of regulated markets for carbon emission permits. These have been subject to some contention, because they have been wrongly understood as allowing people to pay to avoid the burden of pollution control. That is not the case. The creation of regulated carbon markets, the European one being the most important, ensures that the objective of reducing emissions, established politically, is achieved at the lowest possible cost. It is certainly better than what would be achieved by imposing administrative rules on carbon emissions.

Inequality in the distribution of income is another area where the dialogue between economists, public decision-makers and other actors may not easy. It does not have to be like that. Under the second theorem of welfare economics, as long as society chooses the distribution of wealth, an efficient allocation of resources can be achieved through competitive markets. Regardless of the very restrictive conditions in which the theorem applies, what is not always recognized is that it is not up to economists to define what is the best distribution of wealth. It is up to the voters and if they do not agree on the subject, it's not the economists' fault.

Incentives are another issue. The sad view of human nature inherent to *homo economicus* requires incentives to align individual and collective interests. But in practice there can be counterproductive effects. For example, paying someone to donate blood can lead to a reduction in their contribution, so that it doesn't look like they want to make money from it.

A big advantage of a market economy is its price-driven ability to respond to technological or political shocks, shifting the allocation

of resources according to the new sets of relative prices. This was the case for innovations such as electricity or the digital revolution, or for the shocks induced by globalization. Hopefully, it will be the case of artificial intelligence. However, Economics is less conclusive about the speed at which markets adjust or about the consequences of the adjustment process on the geographical distribution of economic activities. The relevant geographical areas rarely coincide with the countries, and this is a natural source of tension in the dialogue between national governments and economists driven by an efficiency criterion. In the same sense, it is a political problem, not an economic one, to decide, for example, whether small marginal societal gains, resulting from more globalization, compensate for subsequent local crises. Sensible economists may try to understand the political point of view.

All along, Economics has been contributing to a better understanding of technological progress, which is the very successful means that humans have found to alleviate the problem of scarcity. But we will always have scarcity. More likely than not, economists will continue to enjoy being called practitioners of "*the dismal science*."

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Editions

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**Books – in whatever form – preserve the past,
respond to the present and prepare us
for the future**

Publishing has always been a service to the community of authors and readers. In the case of academic publishing, its target is the community of those who produce knowledge through research, those who teach and those who learn.

UCP Press assumes its position of recognised prestige in the academic and business environment with the mission of expanding the objectives of the Universidade Católica Portuguesa: to produce international-level science aimed at the common good and to prepare generations for the future through excellence in teaching.

Our catalogue includes academic publications which disseminate innovative and rigorous research, carried out, mostly but not exclusively, within the scope of UCP's scientific activity. Five major thematic areas aggregate our publications: Arts and Humanities; Social Sciences; Medicine and Health; Law; and Theology.

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As has been widely discussed, publishing practices are undergoing a period of enormous transformation. The digitisation of library collections, in line with the objectives of Open Science, and the emergence of digital libraries and scientific repositories, only serve to reinforce the Enlightenment idea that “knowledge is a social right.” On the other hand, open access and the wider reach of this knowledge will require new editorial roles such as information mediation, combating misinformation, promoting accessibility and the preservation of memory.

A couple of years ago, we therefore decided to invest in new forms of publication, namely in e-books and, more recently, in open books. E-books in general provide an excellent opportunity to disseminate knowledge with smaller costs, mainly in their material production and their physical distribution. E-books allow us to be present in international markets beyond borders.

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However, printed books currently still account for 75% of our publications. In recent years, UCP Press has consolidated its position in the market, publishing over 100 titles annually, with more than 30,000 copies printed.

In combining the positive impact of reading a physical book – both in cognitive terms and in the way it strengthens a sense of community – with the global outreach offered by digital platforms, we support the value of knowledge production. Books – in whatever form – preserve the past, respond to the present and prepare us for the future.



Education

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And, what if we try this together? A community-driven approach to sustain Pedagogical Change

This essay explores the value of a community-driven approach to transforming teaching practices, arguing that sustained educational change requires the collective commitment of the academic community. It traces a progression from the individual to the institutional level, outlining how local, disciplinary or departmental communities can be intentionally woven into a coherent and 'unique' university-wide community, as a critical milestone on the path to system-level transformation. The essay addresses both the rationale ('why') and the implementation ('how') of a community-driven approach that leads to the sustainability of pedagogical change and transformation, drawing on the ongoing experience at Universidade Católica Portuguesa.

Why a community-driven approach?

Higher education is changing, students are learning differently, and we collectively are challenged to re-examine our practices and the way we are designing learning experiences. Rather than reflecting in isolation, we can reflect together, test new models together, and learn from one another. So, we had a dream: connect faculty, connect pedagogical experiences, and connect projects as we can work jointly toward pedagogical transformation across the university.

A community-driven approach is well-suited to this aim. It broadens engagement and accelerates diffusion: interdisciplinary and inter-departmental communities create scalable settings in which colleagues reflect together, share concrete teaching experiences,

and recontextualise practices, conditions that expand participation across disciplines and speed the uptake of effective approaches (Soares *et al.*, 2024). This approach also aligns with how faculty prefer or choose to learn: professional development gains traction when it balances formal opportunities (e.g., focused pedagogical workshops) with informal, situated learning (e.g., peer observation, short classroom experiments, and communities of learning and practice), which improves perceived relevance and sustains engagement (Gil & Tavares, 2025).

Community-led processes also enhance legitimacy through participation (Weber, 2011). Grounded in actionresearch principles, they make representation and local decisionmaking visible, distribute agency, and capture specificities and 'small' constraints that centrally designed programs may miss – thereby reducing the perceived risk of trying new approaches and strengthening the credibility of change efforts (Weber, 2011). In parallel, the community enhances institutional identity and the sense of belonging: we recognise that we are "in the same boat," facing similar challenges and uncertainties, and we benefit from a secure environment in which testing innovations and sharing vulnerabilities are part of a collective practice (Soares *et al.*, 2024).

A community orientation also supports external relevance and scalability. By connecting academic work with civic, social, and professional partners, the university can better align pedagogical innovation with societal needs and create conditions for changes to endure and scale, creating a shared agenda among communities (Fuller, Brown & Smith, 2023).

Finally, a community-driven approach supports inclusive transformation. Intentional provision for adjunct/contingent colleagues, through teaching academies, practicesharing forums, learning practice communities, mentoring, and recognition at peer and institutional levels, allowing that each one has a voice in the community (Fuller, Brown & Smith, 2023).

How does the community foster a sustainable Pedagogical Change?

Managing and sustaining pedagogical change is a complex challenge. An isolated innovation may serve as an important first step, yet it is insufficient to generate meaningful or lasting transformation. Aggregating multiple 'first steps' can, however, begin to build the collective momentum towards pedagogical transformation. It is precisely at this point that

Kotter's 8 Step Change Model becomes a valuable framework for guiding and sustaining institutional change.

1. Create a Sense of Urgency by highlighting the importance of working together towards common challenges that all university stakeholders are facing. Joining efforts, sharing practices, learning together and from each other, for collective innovation rather than isolated innovation.
2. Form a Powerful Coalition: Assemble a group with energy, interest and enthusiasm to lead the change (faculty from different departments, who want to work together: a team of 'suspects' of and for pedagogical innovation).
3. Develop a Vision and Strategy: Create, in a participatory process, a shared vision to direct the team effort and define an action plan to achieve these collective goals.
4. Communicate the Vision: Share the vision and strategies with all institutional stakeholders to gain support, using the team as a vehicle of connection across departments, blurring disciplinary silos.
5. Remove Obstacles: Identify and eliminate barriers to change, at a micro and macro level, empowering faculty to take action; reinforce the team agency, integrating all on new projects, "all on board".
6. Create Short-Term Wins: Plan for visible improvements and recognise and reward those involved in the change; identify microactions grounded in peer learning and shared practices (such as cycles of pedagogical workshops and communities of learning and practice) and acknowledge the contributions of those engaged in innovative projects.
7. Consolidate Gains and Produce More Change: Use the increased credibility to align systems, structures, and policies with the vision, shifting from a bottom-up approach to one that is also supported topdown, thereby strengthening institutional commitment, support, and recognition.
8. Anchor New Approaches in the Culture: Reinforce the changes by embedding them in the organisation's culture, for example, by integrating a comprehensive faculty professional development programme into the core of the Institutional Strategic Plan, ensuring both a strong formal and informal presence across all departments, and consolidating a shared commitment to pedagogical transformation grounded in community praxis.

And, what if we try this together?

Trying, working, reflecting and creating together is essential: pedagogical change endures only when it is done in community. We advocate for a community-driven perspective that brings all stakeholders into the process as the key drivers of institutional transformation. Using Kotter's model as an iterative governance framework to coordinate action, adapt to evidence, and ensure that pedagogical innovation is both meaningful and lasting. *Let's continue trying together!*

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Entrepreneurship

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Community as the living infrastructure of Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is often portrayed as an individual journey, the story of a visionary who defies odds and creates something new through personal drive and exceptional talent. Yet decades of research show that entrepreneurial activity is, fundamentally, a community-embedded process. New ventures emerge not in isolation but through interactions, relationships, shared knowledge, and collective meaning-making. For this reason, the idea of community is not peripheral to entrepreneurship: it is the infrastructure that enables it.

This chapter reflects on how community shapes entrepreneurial action, drawing from established insights in the field while connecting them to the lived experience of universities as communities of knowledge, purpose, and transformation.

1. Community as a source of knowledge

Entrepreneurship begins with noticing and interpreting opportunities, a process that rarely occurs in isolation. Research shows that opportunities often emerge through participation in networks and communities of practice rather than through individual insight alone. Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of situated learning, widely applied in entrepreneurship research, highlights how knowledge is acquired through social participation and shared activity, enabling individuals to recognize patterns, understand industry dynamics and imagine alternative futures.

Communities provide the conditions for this form of learning. Interactions with peers, mentors and practitioners, as well as exposure

to diverse disciplinary perspectives, shape how entrepreneurial ideas are developed. A student exploring an idea in a university lab or classroom, a researcher sharing findings at a seminar, or a team testing prototypes with local organizations are all acts of community-embedded learning. Within entrepreneurial ecosystems, knowledge spillovers allow ideas to circulate across individuals and institutions, linking scientific discovery, technological development and business experimentation. In this way, communities do not merely transmit information; they cultivate collective intelligence that no entrepreneur can generate alone.

2. Community as a mechanism of legitimacy

While community-based learning is essential for recognizing and developing entrepreneurial opportunities, knowledge alone is rarely sufficient to turn an idea into a viable venture. Even highly innovative initiatives must acquire legitimacy to be understood, accepted and supported by relevant audiences. As Aldrich and Fiol's (1994) classic analysis argues, new firms in emerging contexts face not only resource constraints but also deficits in cognitive legitimacy, as their activities are not yet taken for granted, and sociopolitical legitimacy, as they lack broad social endorsement. Communities play a decisive role in addressing these challenges by helping new initiatives become comprehensible, credible and aligned with shared norms.

Legitimacy flows through multiple channels, including social networks in which trusted individuals and early investors signal confidence in an entrepreneur's capabilities; local institutions such as universities, incubators or civic associations that provide formal endorsement and position new ventures within established structures; and community narratives that frame emerging ideas in culturally meaningful ways. Together, these mechanisms help new ventures become understandable and worthy of support. When early collaborators, local partners or alumni engage with a student- or researcher-led venture, they do more than offer practical assistance; they enable the project to cross the threshold from possibility to reality.

3. Community as emotional and moral support

Securing legitimacy and external support is a necessary step in the entrepreneurial process, but it does not eliminate the uncertainty,

personal risk and exposure to failure that entrepreneurs face. Behavioural research in the field indicates that psychological factors, including resilience, persistence and the ability to cope with setbacks, play a crucial role in entrepreneurial outcomes. Communities provide the emotional scaffolding that sustains individuals through this volatile journey. Empirical research in entrepreneurship reveals that emotional support from social networks enhances persistence in the early stages of venture development, thereby increasing the likelihood that entrepreneurs continue despite setbacks and uncertainty (Klyver, Honig, & Steffens, 2018).

Within a university setting, this support takes concrete forms: encouragement from peers, guidance and empathy from faculty mentors, advice from alumni who have previously navigated entrepreneurial paths, or reassurance from supervisors when experiments fail or ideas need to be rethought. These community ties alleviate the emotional burden of decision-making and help entrepreneurs reframe obstacles not as signs of incapacity but as expected components of experimentation and learning. In this way, the university community transforms uncertainty into a shared experience, making persistence and long-term engagement more likely.

4. Community as a site of co-creation

Beyond learning, legitimacy and emotional support, communities also shape how entrepreneurial ideas are refined over time. Once entrepreneurs can cope with uncertainty and persist through early setbacks, they rarely advance alone. Entrepreneurship is not merely about launching a venture; it is about mobilizing people around a shared vision and coordinating contributions from multiple actors. Communities facilitate this mobilization by providing spaces for co-creation, environments where diverse actors contribute and shape a project's trajectory. Research on collective innovation shows that new ideas often emerge through community-based co-creation, in which multiple actors contribute to iteratively shape solutions over time (von Hippel & von Krogh, 2003).

This co-creation may occur within established structures, such as university entrepreneurship centres or student clubs, or informally among colleagues and friends. Either way, community is the arena where ideas evolve through iteration. Even the smallest entrepreneurial

insight is typically the result of numerous conversations: peers who challenge assumptions, researchers who provide data, practitioners who test prototypes, and supporters who help articulate the mission.

The university as community

Universities occupy a distinctive position within entrepreneurial communities because they bring together, in a sustained and structured way, many of the social dynamics on which entrepreneurship depends. They are spaces where disciplinary, cultural and generational diversity coexist, enabling interactions among students, researchers, faculty, alumni and external partners who might otherwise never meet. This diversity underpins the circulation of ideas, the formation of relationships and the emergence of new entrepreneurial possibilities.

Seen in this light, the university is not simply a setting where ventures are launched, but a living community that enables learning, legitimacy, resilience and collective creation to reinforce one another. By cultivating such communities, universities contribute not only to the formation of new ventures but also to the development of entrepreneurs who understand entrepreneurship as a fundamentally relational and socially embedded process.

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Ethics

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Ethics, a lived, relational, and transformative force

This essay reflects on ethics as a living foundation of communities, emphasising its role in sustaining the bonds that hold them together, guiding collective action toward the common good, and enabling transformation without losing sight of fundamental human values.

The theme of community resonates strongly with the mission of universities that are rooted in their territories, attentive to the people they serve, and committed to social transformation through knowledge. Within this horizon, ethics cannot be reduced to regulatory compliance or abstract moral principles. Rather, it concerns the orientation of human action toward a good and meaningful life, understood as the responsible pursuit of what is genuinely worthwhile. Drawing on Aristotle's practical philosophy, ethics can be understood as an operative and reflective orientation of action toward *eudaimonia*, or human flourishing, realised not in isolation but with and for others within shared forms of life (Aristotle, 2016). Ethics thus involves the formation of character through persistent action guided by practical wisdom (*phronesis*), enabling individuals and institutions to deliberate well about what is good in concrete and situated contexts. It concerns not only what we do, but how and why we do it, shaping who we become through practices embedded in communities, structures, and institutions. In this sense, ethical life is inseparable from collective responsibility and from the pursuit of the common good.

Within the university and its role in society, ethics should therefore be understood as a lived, relational, and transformative force. It sustains collective life, enables cooperation, and provides orientation for social, environmental, and cultural transformation. Ethics is not an external

supplement to communal life, but a constitutive condition that allows academic, scientific, and social communities to exist as spaces of trust, respect, meaning, and shared responsibility. When ethics weakens, communities cease to order their practices toward their proper end (*telos*), understood in an Aristotelian sense as the common good that gives coherence to life in common. Action then risks being guided primarily by short-term utility, with a consequent loss of cohesion and shared purpose.

At a deeper level, ethics concerns the human being as a constitutively relational subject. Personal identity is not formed in isolation, but through relationships that precede us and call us into responsibility. Identity takes shape through encounters with others, sustained commitments, and responsibilities assumed over time. Paul Ricoeur's distinction between *ipseity*, the self as capable of promise, responsibility, and accountability, and *sameness*, the continuity that allows recognition over time, offers a valuable framework for understanding ethical subjectivity as dynamic, narrative, and relational (Ricoeur, 1992). Ethical life unfolds in the tension between fidelity to oneself and openness to the claims of others. This relational understanding of the self provides an important foundation for academic communities that value diversity, promote dialogue as an ethical practice, and recognise cooperation across cultures and disciplines as essential to life in common.

Ethics sustains communities by providing more than a shared framework of rules or goals; it establishes the moral conditions under which communal life becomes possible and endures. Communities are not held together solely by convergent interests, institutional arrangements, or coordinated action, but by the mutual recognition of their members as persons of moral worth, whose dignity demands respect and responsibility.

This ethical grounding is neither abstract nor incidental. It is disclosed in the everyday practices through which communal life is enacted and renewed: fairness in deliberation rather than mere procedural compliance; attentiveness to vulnerability that resists indifference; care expressed in sustained and concrete action; openness to difference that treats plurality as a moral resource rather than a threat; and responsibility in communication, where speech is guided by truthfulness, restraint, and awareness of its effects. Ethics, in this sense, is not external to community but its internal condition of possibility. Without it,

coordination degenerates into coercion, dialogue into strategic exchange, and coexistence into mere proximity. Language alone does not create a community. Words become binding only when grounded in ethical commitment and embodied in action. Communities endure through lived responsibility, through what members consistently do for and with one another over time.

Beyond sustaining communities, ethics also has a clear orientation toward service. To serve ethically is to direct science, knowledge, power, and innovation toward the common good rather than efficiency alone. Ethical service originates not in control or optimisation, but in attentiveness to concrete human needs. As Emmanuel Levinas emphasises, ethical responsibility arises from responsiveness to the Other and precedes calculations of utility or strategic rationality (Levinas, 1969). Ethical service therefore requires situated and reflective deliberation, expressed in practical questions: who is affected by a given action, what is at stake in a particular context, and how can knowledge contribute responsibly to improving human conditions. This understanding of ethics as service lies at the heart of meaningful community engagement and the co-creation of knowledge with and for society. It frames the university not as a closed space of knowledge production, but as a moral community embedded within a broader social frame.

This ethical orientation becomes particularly visible in the major areas of transformation currently confronting universities. In the environmental domain, ethics calls institutions to recognise their responsibility toward future generations and the natural world, guiding research, teaching, and innovation toward genuinely sustainable and regenerative practices. In the digital domain, it requires sustained critical reflection and a well-formed moral conscience in relation to technology, ensuring that digital transformation and scientific innovation serve human dignity, respect autonomy, and promote justice, beneficence, non-maleficence, and proportionality, rather than narrow efficiency, control, or power. In the societal domain, ethics challenges universities to respond actively to inequality, fragmentation, and marginalisation, and to affirm their role as spaces for the formation of citizenship, the cultivation of social cohesion, and the exercise of public responsibility.

Ethics is inseparable from character, understood in the Aristotelian sense as a disposition (*hexis*) formed through the repetition of good and just actions. As Aristotle notes, “it is by doing just actions that we

become just" (Aristotle, 2016). Ethics therefore concerns all members of the academic community, not only leaders or specialists, since individual actions directly affect institutional purpose and credibility. It operates as a principle of shared responsibility, sustained by *civic philia* – the bond of trust and mutual recognition that makes justice in common life possible. While moral reflection distinguishes good from evil, ethics asks why the good merits commitment and why harmful practices endure despite being recognised as such. As Alasdair MacIntyre argues, ethical communities are formed through shared practices oriented toward internal goods rather than mere instrumental success (MacIntyre, 1981). Universities thus bear a distinctive responsibility for the formation of character, cultivating habits of honesty, courage, coherence, commitment, and truthfulness. This perspective is also expressed in Paul Ricoeur's definition of ethics as "the good life, with and for others, in just institutions" (Ricoeur, 1992). In the university context, this implies that technical competence and productivity are insufficient. What is required is the capacity to act responsibly, to relate ethically, and to assume accountability within increasingly complex institutional systems.

Finally, ethics has a genuinely transformative dimension. Contemporary challenges such as environmental degradation, accelerated digitalisation, and social fragmentation cannot be addressed through technical or procedural solutions alone. They require an ethical orientation capable of introducing critical distance, interrogating inherited assumptions, and reconfiguring practices considering what is ultimately of value. In Aristotelian terms, it is through *phronesis* that action is ordered toward the human good that confers meaning and coherence upon practice (Aristotle, 2016). In this context, academic communities are called to resist indifference and forms of complicit silence, a responsibility articulated by António Sonegal in his analysis of the silent modes of violence that erode communal bonds and moral responsibility (Sonegal, 2022). Ethics, therefore, does not occupy a peripheral position in academic life but constitutes its normative core. It sustains universities as communities of meaning, capable of orienting knowledge, responsibility, and innovation toward a shared future that is not merely efficient or productive, but substantively human and just.

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Food Safety

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Food Safety implies the availability of diverse, nutritious, and safe food for all

Food is the third most basic human need, following air and water. It is a fundamental right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and a cornerstone of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in ensuring Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3), achieving Zero Hunger (SDG 2), and promoting Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12).

The right to food implies more than just access; it implies the availability of diverse, nutritious, and safe food for all. Reality often stands in stark contrast to this ideal. According to the World Health Organization, an estimated 600 million cases of foodborne disease occur each year worldwide, resulting in approximately 420 000 deaths. This means that almost one in ten people globally fall ill after consuming contaminated food, with children under five years of age bearing around 40% of the total disease burden¹. Even in high-income regions, the challenge persists; the recent EFSA One Health 2024 Zoonoses Report highlights that the number of foodborne outbreaks in 2024 increased by 15% compared to 2023, and infections like listeriosis remain a severe and often deadly threat².

1 Havelaar, A. H., Kirk, M. D., Torgerson, P. R., Gibb, H. J., Hald, T., Lake, R. J., Praet, N., Bellinger, D. C., de Silva, N. R., Gargouri, N., Speybroeck, N., Cawthorne, A., Mathers, C., Stein, C., Angulo, F. J., Devleesschauwer, B., & World Health Organization Foodborne Disease Burden Epidemiology Reference Group, (2015). World Health Organization Global Estimates and Regional Comparisons of the Burden of Foodborne Disease in 2010. *PLoS Medicine*, 12(12), e1001923. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1001923>

2 EFSA and ECDC (European Food Safety Authority and European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control), (2025). The European Union One Health 2024 Zoonoses Report. *EFSA Journal*, 23(12), e9759. <https://doi.org/10.2903/j.efsa.2025.9759>

In this challenging context, where the path from farm to fork is fraught with invisible hazards and where myths often travel faster than facts, the role of the university must transcend the walls of laboratories, amphitheatres, and classrooms. To truly serve, a university must be a living community, one that exists in, with, and for the communities that surround it.

For over 40 years, the Faculty of Biotechnology at Universidade Católica Portuguesa, in close articulation with its research centre, the CBQF (Centre for Biotechnology and Fine Chemistry), has embodied this mission. We view food safety not merely as a technical requirement, but as a communal pact. “If it is not safe, it is not food”. This conviction drives a cycle of knowledge, service, and transformation that ripples through various layers of society.

A Community of Care

The university’s role in community protection is perhaps most visible when public health is at risk. Decades ago, faced with a gap in national data, our researchers did not wait for official directives. We proactively coordinated with 25 hospitals to collect epidemiological data on listeriosis, creating a surveillance network where none existed. This initiative was not just about publishing papers; it was about protecting lives. By employing advanced molecular typing techniques, we helped identify the first listeriosis outbreak in Portugal, which had one of the highest mortality rates in the world (exceeding 30%), and traced the source of contamination to fresh cheese, working side-by-side with national health and food safety authorities.³ This collaborative spirit turns scientific data into a public shield, proving that a research centre is a vital organ in the body of national health infrastructure.

A Community of Innovation

A community also depends on its economic vitality. Food safety is comprehensively addressed in our BSc and Master’s programmes, ensuring that new graduates enter the workforce with a solid foundation in public health protection. Building on this academic training, our

3 Magalhães, R., Almeida, G., Ferreira, V., Santos, I., Silva, J., Mendes, M. M., Pita, J., Mariano, G., Mancio, I., Sousa, M. M., Farber, J., Pagotto, F., & Teixeira, P., (2015). Cheese-Related Listeriosis Outbreak, Portugal, March 2009 to February 2012. *Euro Surveillance*, 20(17), 21104. <https://doi.org/10.2807/1560-7917.es2015.20.17.21104>

Postgraduate Course in Food Safety, established more than 20 years ago, has played a key role in continuously updating the skills of senior professionals, transferring cutting-edge knowledge directly into the food industry. But our engagement goes deeper. We partner with companies to solve persistent problems, such as eliminating stubborn pathogens from processing environments or developing “clean label” antimicrobial solutions. By researching biological control strategies to replace chemical preservatives, we help the industry meet the consumer’s demand for natural, safe, and sustainable products. This fosters a community of entrepreneurs who are equipped not just with business acumen, but with the scientific rigour necessary to ensure the safety and longevity of the food supply chain.

A Community of Learning

Perhaps the most profound impact of the university lies in its ability to translate complex science into daily habits. Knowledge is most powerful when it is accessible. Recognizing that foodborne illnesses disproportionately affect the vulnerable, we have taken science out of the classroom and into the homes of those who need it most.

We believe that education begins early, a philosophy driven by the project *“De pequenino se torce o pepino: lições de segurança alimentar para os mais novos”* (As the twig is bent, so grows the tree: food safety lessons for the young). Guided by the ancient proverb “I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand,” this initiative prioritizes experimental science education. We bring hands-on laboratory activities to preschool and primary school children, allowing them to visualize the “invisible world” of microbes. By doing, they understand the basics of food safety, becoming ambassadors of hygiene within their own families. By instilling this mindset early, we are nurturing a generation that values evidence over superstition.

Simultaneously, we recognize that learning is a lifelong journey. Under the project *“É sempre tempo de aprender: lições de segurança alimentar para os mais velhos”* (It is always time to learn: food safety lessons for the elderly), our outreach campaigns target older demographics. We also focus on other vulnerable groups through projects like *“Listeriose: uma infecção grave mas fácil de prevenir”* (Listeriosis: a severe but preventable infection). Whether through television, radio, newspapers, or direct workshops, the goal is constant – to empower citizens with

science-based information, reducing the burden of illness and bridging the gap between the expert and the consumer.

A Shared Future

Despite global advancements, foodborne diseases remain a significant public health issue, with millions falling ill annually. Paradoxically, we face both food insecurity and significant food waste. Addressing these challenges requires a systemic approach where food safety is seen as an integral component of sustainability.

This is where the university finds its ultimate purpose. By generating robust science, training capable professionals, and educating an informed public, we act as a catalyst for a better community. We are not an ivory tower; we are a hub where researchers, industry leaders, healthcare professionals, and citizens meet. In this intersection, we find the “positive way to prospect our common life.”

When a child washes their hands before a meal because of a school workshop, when a factory successfully eliminates a pathogen using a biological solution, or when an outbreak is stopped early due to rigorous surveillance, the university is fulfilling its promise. We are present. We are empowering. We are building a safer, healthier community, one discovery at a time.



History

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Seeking community through History. The Portuguese Case

The term ‘community’ refers to groups of individuals with shared interests, identities, goals, geographic locations or history who interact and develop bonds with each other. Nowadays, the concept applies to both physical and online groups, and communities can be categorized in various ways, depending on their purposes. In this sense, they can be based on interests or themes, on geographical location, or on history. Communities are important because they foster a sense of belonging and closeness, facilitating the exchange of information, experiences, and mutual support, since what transforms a collective into a community are interpersonal relationships and the sharing of experiences.

The search for community has always shaped human history. But there is a difference between what a community is and what it aspires to be.

In his work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson introduces the concept of the imagined community, emphasizing that an imagined community is different from a real community, as it is not based solely and exclusively on the interaction of its members. On the contrary, it is an example of a socially constructed community, imagined by people who perceive themselves as part of a group or cultural community.

In formulating and presenting this conceptual tool, Anderson methodologically highlights the importance of the press and literature, since, in his view, these are the most important practices and techniques for creating a discourse capable of giving meaning and significance to an imagined community. This allows for sharing common interests or

aspects of identity, creating and maintaining a lively and conscious notion of belonging and shared legacies. In order to get to know a community and to have a sense of belonging, it is necessary to have direct or indirect contact with it to perceive its common cultural capital, as Pierre Bourdieu calls it.

Anderson emphasizes the fact that it was only at the end of the 19th century, for various reasons, including the increasing massification and education of the population, that people aspired to greater participation and, at the same time, awareness of the cultural community to which they belonged. This gave rise to new sciences that sought to study these aspects: history, anthropology and, in some countries (and at that time not yet in Portugal), sociology.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Portuguese intellectuals made multiple observations about Portugal and, at the same time, about the Portuguese people, seeking to define and understand this imagined community as real. The recognition and identification of Portuguese culture, in particular popular culture, with its specific formations, and the appropriation of these formations as symbols of nationality are common denominators in the discourses of authors from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, forming what Rui Ramos called the “second foundation” or refoundation of nationality, after its original foundation as a country in the 12th century.

It was important for them to recognize and identify the unknown Portugal, and it was often in the historical exploration of the traditional, national and ancient world that the authentic and true Portugal was supposed to be found. It was argued that only by understanding Portuguese history and its driving forces, would it be possible to construct Portugal as a ‘collective individual’ characterized by specific cultural and national elements, as was done throughout Europe in the tradition of seeking a kind of ethnic psychology or *Volksgeist*.

The Portuguese community is defined as a combination of historical, geographical, political and cultural factors that have shaped its identity over the centuries. More than just a nation-state, Portugal is understood and represented as a community whose cohesion lies in a shared history of expansion and migration, the permanence of its language and culture, and a collective awareness of identity.

Portuguese identity has been forged for centuries and has remained remarkably stable in its main definitions compared to other European

nations. In this view, language is perhaps the most powerful unifying element. Portuguese is not only the official language within the national territory; it is the main link with the vast Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP), which formalizes this historical heritage shared by more than 265 million speakers worldwide. Language is the vehicle of collective memory and cultural expression. The Portuguese language works as a living extension of the historical Portuguese community, because its collective identity does not dissolve with distance or time. It is a persistent cultural and emotional connection, maintained through language, memory and a shared awareness of global history.

With a history inseparable from the sea, migration is a structural feature of the Portuguese community, both historically and to the present days. From the 15th to the 21st century, it is impossible to understand this community without considering the dynamics of migration. These dynamics have resulted in communities that, in every corner of the world, bear witness to and consolidate a Portuguese presence and that of people of Portuguese descent. At the same time, Portugal is today a country of immigration, mainly for people coming from African states and from the Indian subcontinent.

As Zygmunt Baumann argues, community is not a static and stable phenomenon. On the contrary, it requires a constant search for what is longed for, what is desired, constant vigilance and care to maintain the balance between freedom and change and the needs of belonging. History herein serves as a vehicle of confirmation and consolidation: open to a permanent future to be shaped together in community.

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Hope

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Hope: A Transformative Concept

The current scientific understanding of hope and its relationship to comprehensive care is based on multidisciplinary empirical research. It is defined as a fundamental human need that involves the co-creation of possibilities and the resources necessary to realize them. In this context, hope is understood not only as an emotional state but as a dynamic process that evolves over time. It is shaped by cultural factors (such as perception and expression), social factors (including age, gender, and health), and political factors (including ideologies and belief systems that may restrict or enhance its expression).¹

Globally, hope, distinct from individual optimism, is closely linked to general well-being and holistic health. As such, hope represents a subjective and unique experience, reflecting individuals' ability to imagine alternative solutions when faced with uncertainty or adversity. From a social and psychological perspective, hope is a multidimensional concept. There is a broad consensus that hope is a shared concept, playing a crucial role in individual and collective resilience.

Hope mobilizes collective action, promoting resilience and enabling lasting transformation in response to adversity and inequality, thereby contributing to a more equitable and sustainable future.^{1,3}

This reflection explores how hope can be effectively integrated into institutional and community practices, with a focus on its applications in areas such as education, technology, and healthcare. Through an interdisciplinary approach, it aims to demonstrate how hope can inspire innovation, connect communities, and contribute to building a more equitable and sustainable future, aligning with the values and objectives of *Transform4Europe*.

Hope as a Catalyst for Social Change

In the context of *Transform4Europe*, hope emerges as a fundamental foundation for promoting social and cultural transformation. The union of Universities, Communities, and Institutions in a collaborative network fosters innovation, sustainability, and the inclusion of hope as an engine for change. In this sense, a commitment is made to creating solutions that respond to global and local needs, promoting collective well-being and social justice.

Collaborative interdisciplinary research efforts have enriched our understanding of hope, integrating different perspectives.⁵ This knowledge base supports the development of effective interventions that address the multifaceted nature of hope, encompassing emotional mechanisms, sustained long-term participation in community-oriented work, and experiences of mutuality, among other aspects.

Hope serves as a catalyst for positive social change, facilitating the establishment of realistic goals and tangible pathways to achieve them, particularly within minority groups within larger collectives that seek shared objectives¹. Social movements driven by hope are evident in educational settings, where the academic community can inspire hopeful actions, fostering dialogue that promotes humanization and reduces systemic oppression.

Education and Technology: Cultivating Hope

Educational contexts serve as incubators of hope. Hope arises from the awareness of the interdependence between humanity and nature. It acts as a transformative force by fostering the ethical, cultural, and spiritual changes necessary to care for our common home. It shapes conscious education by forming responsible citizens committed to environmental and social justice in response to the ecological crisis.

The deliberate creation of hope-focused learning environments allows students to recognize realistic expectations for the future.³ These elements align with the principles of holistic curricular integration, which incorporates the Sustainable Development Goals and provides a cross-cutting approach to implementing the 2030 Agenda.

On the other hand, technology plays a crucial role in spreading hope and promoting social change. Digital platforms, such as social media and communication applications, can be used to bring communities together, share inspiring stories, and create online support networks.⁵ For example,

initiatives such as virtual forums for emotional support, discussion groups on overcoming adversity, and digital awareness campaigns have proven effective in mobilizing collective action and promoting community hope.⁵ Furthermore, technological tools can be integrated into educational programs to foster hope. Interactive apps and educational games that encourage problem-solving and collaboration can help students develop critical thinking and visualize solutions to future challenges.

Hope-Based Interventions

There is substantial evidence supporting the effectiveness of hope-based interdisciplinary interventions, which enhance mental, spiritual, and physical health outcomes in communities both within and beyond university settings.

Projects and Initiatives

Among the institutional projects that use hope as a tool for social transformation, *Hope2Care* (Interdisciplinary Research Centre in Health, Universidade Católica Portuguesa) stands out, promoting research and intervention on the therapeutic use of hope in healthcare, and *Hope4Brain+*, which focuses on interventions for children with cancer and their parents. The latter uses carefully selected stories to help children work on their emotions and feelings, promoting reflections guided by healthcare professionals. The results include improvements in quality of life, comfort, and resilience for parents, as well as advances in executive functioning and a reduction in anxiety for children.

Knowledge about the role of hope in mental health has expanded through studies that demonstrate its impact on reducing depression and anxiety and improving overall well-being. Studies conducted with students during the pandemic crisis highlight the importance of hope and its benefits in contexts of emotional vulnerability.⁴ In this context, training and community programmes have included workshops and capacity-building sessions that allow participants to understand and apply hope-based strategies in their lives.⁴

By integrating research into healthcare and fostering a strong sense of social responsibility, these initiatives support students in understanding the role of hope in addressing global challenges and developing solutions for comprehensive care. An example of this is the *Hope2Care-Service* project, implemented in a neonatal and paediatric intensive care unit of

a partner hospital. It seeks to integrate hope into daily nursing practice, aiming to minimize the impacts of hospitalization, empower parents, and strengthen the bond between parents and children, promoting parental resilience.

Interventions that promote hope generally encompass counselling, mutual support groups, and holistic health programs. The planning of interventions addresses the specific needs of diverse populations, including individuals with chronic illnesses and their caregivers, those facing mental health challenges, and marginalized or vulnerable communities.

Hope as Social Transformation

The involvement of the academic community in initiatives that emphasize learning success and collective empowerment fosters a sense of belonging and shared purpose. This participation can strengthen social networks and support systems, thus increasing community cohesion.

Movements driven by hope promote social change by addressing systemic factors that influence health and well-being. By positioning hope as a catalyst for action, these initiatives motivate communities to collaborate in the pursuit of social justice and better health outcomes. Examples include “Hope in Action” photography contests, hope-centred dialogues, the “Hope Café,” and the integration of hope into the curriculum of different cycles of study and advanced or postgraduate training. The “Hope Café” represented a significant milestone in the analysis of hope as a transformative resource. The proposals and results generated will serve as a basis for future initiatives, improve training, and support the development of an institutional identity that responds to contemporary challenges.

Conclusion

Recognizing hope as a personal psychological experience and a socio-structural achievement allows communities to develop comprehensive strategies that facilitate lasting and meaningful social change. Instead of representing passive optimism, hope constitutes an active and relational process through which communities generate opportunities for change, strengthen collective capacity, and maintain a commitment to transformation, even in the face of significant adversity.

The integration of hope and community in these three dimensions demonstrates the significant impact that hope-based interventions can

have on both individuals and communities. Through knowledge promotion, service provision, and the facilitation of social transformation, hope serves as a catalyst for improving well-being and promoting positive social change.

For hope to be fully integrated into educational and community practices, it is necessary to invest in continuous professional development, strengthen the relationship between educators and students, and create spaces that encourage dialogue and reflection. By fostering a vision of a better future and instilling confidence in the ability to overcome challenges, hope-based social entrepreneurship programmes can empower communities to develop initiatives that generate both economic and social impact, promoting inclusion and sustainability.

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Human Resources

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Building and nurturing a community of interconnected communities

The university is a living community that fulfils its mission when all its domains work in harmony. To the shared mission – train individuals, cultivate science, renew the country and the world, and lead by example – each area, with its distinct knowledge and unique expertise contributes to the common goal. The everyday work of each individual is as an expression of belonging to the mission and each role contributes to something greater than itself.

When the several domains converge, the university also achieves another purpose: to be a community that transforms communities. A community of people, where work, human development, and a sense of belonging drive transformation both within and beyond the institution. In fact, the university's reason for existing is contributing to the surrounding communities through a sum of individual responsibilities embraced with an awareness of the whole that produces a collective Impact. Building and nurturing this community is vital since people are the living infrastructure of the university.

Attracting talent with the right expertise and skills aligned with the institutional mission and values and capable of generating community impact is primordial. And it is not of minor importance knowing which skills should be looked for in candidates and which can be developed and trained. Indeed, some technical skills can be developed through training though in some cases specific academic backgrounds may be required. On the other hand, social, intercultural and ethical skills demand a higher degree of predisposition and natural abilities.

Recruitment plays an important role in the development of organizational culture as the profile of newcomers, their values and beliefs influence the culture and internal context. This happens not only for each individual itself but also for the type of relationship they establish among themselves. On the other hand, these same individuals inserted in an organizational context with its own values and culture end up being influenced, creating a trade-off in both directions and a tendency towards a new balance.

The importance of creating a community that values different backgrounds, cultures and perspectives is well-known to all. The university acts as a meeting place for generations, cultures and professional journeys where cultural, linguistic and disciplinary diversity are a source of community richness.

In today's fast-paced world, there are now five generations working together in the workplace, which places new challenges for employers, managers and even colleagues.

Generations are designed to be similar in length (about 15–20 years), but they're not evenly sized. They are defined more by shared historical and cultural experiences (wars, technology shifts, economic events) than by a fixed number of years, thus arising Intergenerational differences. In fact, the "shared experience window" is being shrunk contributing to accentuate differences between generations.

These five generations, currently working alongside each other, each shaped by unique historical events, technology, and cultural shifts, bringing different values, communication styles, work habits, mindsets and perspectives require employers to build bridges and foster understanding for effective collaboration and innovation.

The university is also a community of Shared Knowledge and Shared Learning.

In this ecosystem of interconnected communities development is pursued in several different ways. Continuous learning and reskilling/upskilling contribute to a more prepared and resilient community able to serve local communities with a broad and lasting impact. Formal and informal learning among professionals take place allowing learning from one another – across areas, roles, and generations. Working at the university is, in itself, a continuous learning process.

By investing in people, the university reinforces its role as a responsible employer committed to long-term sustainability of its human capital.

Founded on the principle of truth, respect for people and environment as shared values, the university aims at being a workplace with purpose, where professional fulfilment aligns with institutional mission.

It emerges as a community of human communities, and as any responsible employer, a community begins by caring for its people. But well-being is not only a responsibility, it is also seen as an enabler of innovation, engagement and societal impact. People are the heart of the university and therefore at the heart of the university. Only with a vision like this can community spirit be transformed into service and transformation of other communities around.



Inclusion

Carmo Themudo is Coordinator of the Integral Development of the Person Unit

“No one is saved alone; it is only possible to be saved together.”

Pope Francis

To speak of inclusion is to speak of humanity. It is to recognise that each person, with their history, talents and frailties, has a unique place in the community. Inclusion is not just an ethical principle or an institutional policy; it is a profound commitment to human dignity, which challenges us to create spaces where everyone can participate, learn and grow. Pope Francis was inspiring: “God, in his plan of love, does not want to exclude anyone, but wants to include everyone.”

At the Universidade Católica Portuguesa, and particularly in the Unit for Integral Development of the Person (UDIP), we believe that the integral development of the person is only possible when diversity is welcomed and valued. Inclusion means opening doors, but also building bridges: between cultures, knowledge, experiences and ways of being. It is a movement that begins with the gaze – a gaze that sees in the other not a difference that separates, but a richness that adds.

In a time marked by subtle inequalities and exclusions, inclusion requires courage and creativity. It is not enough to guarantee access; it is necessary to promote belonging. This implies educational environments that respect rhythms, listen to voices, and recognise vulnerabilities and potentialities. As Pope Francis recalls in the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*: “No one is saved alone; it is only possible to be saved together.”

UDIP seeks to take on this challenge in its activities: to care for the person in various dimensions – emotional, spiritual and social. Because inclusion is more than integration; it is accompanying, it is giving meaning,

it is creating conditions for each student to discover who they are and who they can be. It is, ultimately, educating for freedom and responsibility.

When we talk about inclusion, we also talk about community. *T4EU Week* reminds us that there is no community without communities: each group, identity and voice contribute to a stronger and fairer social fabric. Pope Francis repeated at WYD Lisbon 2023: “There is room for everyone, everyone, everyone in the Church.” This sentence has become a symbol of a culture that welcomes without barriers and challenges us to leave our comfort zone and go to the peripheries.

The future we desire is not built with walls, but with bridges. Bridges that connect knowledge, cultures and generations; that allow each person to find their place and contribute to the common good. Pope Francis’s vision in *Fratelli Tutti* shows that there is no true human development without the contribution of the most vulnerable. And diversity is a source of wealth, never a reason for exclusion.

Is not inclusion a form of love? To love is to recognise in others an inalienable value, a dignity that does not depend on conditions, but is constitutive of their humanity. It is this love that gives meaning to education and makes a truly human society possible.

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Infrastructure

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Beyond buildings: University Infrastructure as an academic life model

Many believe that academic institutions are neutral locations in which science and teaching simply occur.

However, this perspective ignores the degree to which Infrastructure is a paramount participant in shaping academic life. The physical and digital environments of a University are not simply passive contexts. They influence behaviour, participation, outcomes or even the values that are transmitted within the institution. Every single design decision – from routes for circulation to open areas; connectivity to the landscape – plays a relevant part in how well a Community performs, and, even further still, impacts on its whole constitution.

At this time of hybrid change, a Campus must be seen as an integrative whole with social, environmental and digital dimensions, all coming together to form one entity.

The Social dimension: space as the enabler of exchange between people

Academic communities do not evolve spontaneously. They rely on chances for casual conversation and unprompted interactions, frequently stimulated by spatial design.

Conventional Campus layouts often disentangle fields and faculties into separate buildings, thereby locking academia into silos. Although functional, this limits cross-disciplinary communication.

Modern institutions of higher learning are now realizing that cooperation takes place in shared spaces where students are able to move, find themselves and meet each other. The use of open learning

spaces, flexible commons, informal meeting zones, outdoor areas and sports grounds, acts as a social connector and fosters the sense of belonging, as Strange and Banning (2015) pointed out.

“If the Infrastructure fails to provide these informal spaces, the community remains fragmented, with students and faculty retreating to their quarters the moment a class ends.”

A Campus that is based on openness over enclosure is an indication that the institution works together to promote collaboration and shared knowledge, allowing for informal hallway conversations to develop into multidisciplinary research projects. In other words, a Community.

The Environmental Dimension: Campus as an Ethical Statement

Nowadays, it is impossible to neglect the environmental dimension of a Campus.

Promoting lower waste production while separating and preparing it for recycling is non-negotiable. The move towards ‘green buildings’, with reduced energy consumption, emissions and carbon footprint, is inevitable. Having electric vehicle charging stations, parking for bicycles or fostering ride sharing is mandatory.

A University’s Infrastructure is its most palpable and visible ethical statement.

The Campus is the perfect place to enrol a population of students, faculty and staff in environmental awareness programmes and to educate them, through daily habits, in the possibilities of a sustainable future. In this sense, the Campus itself becomes a kind of learning tool and should set the standard for what we want our Society to become, going beyond the classroom and the Campus walls.

From another perspective, vegetation, water, sunlight and outdoor spaces have a major impact on the well-being and cognitive performance of everyone. Campuses featuring green (vegetation) and blue (water) infrastructure are environments that are restorative and conducive to mental clarity, concentration and well-being, as Leal Filho (2017) argues. These attributes are not secondary to academic success; they are paramount to it and should be promoted.

The Digital Dimension: a Broader Campus

With the advent of digital technologies, the nature of a University’s

Infrastructure is now, more than ever, an open question. It's clear that the Campus is no longer confined to its physical limits.

Virtual learning tools, high-speed networks and intelligent systems have brought academics beyond classrooms and lecture halls. This digital layer offers freedom for teachers and students to be remotely connected, opening a new myriad of opportunities.

The challenge is that the digital infrastructure needs to be strategically combined with the physical one. If merely viewed as a technical tool, it runs the risk of undermining the "feeling of place" that many physical Campuses offer. The trick is to ensure that virtual tools cannot replace interaction.

Well-designed digital systems enhance hybrid forms of participation, help streamline the use of resources, provide connectivity, and enhance the relevance of in-person social experiences without replacing them.

Infrastructure as the steppingstone of academic excellence.

The case of UCP

When the Infrastructure of a Campus is aligned with the social, environmental, and digital vectors, it can adapt and grow, creating the sort of environment where experimentation, collaboration, and knowledge production thrive. Where a Community develops and thrives.

Carefully built Campuses can cultivate innovation, inclusion and a sense of belonging and resiliency, embodying the University's essence as a place of learning and as a precursor of civic duty.

At Universidade Católica Portuguesa we aspire to have Campuses that are physical manifestations of the aforementioned principles.

We know that a Campus is not a set of fixed assets but a dynamic ecosystem of buildings, green spaces and digital networks, constituting the foundation of academic life.

At UCP we are currently planning the extension of our largest Campus, located in Lisbon (UCP Palma), with those principles in mind. This new building aims to have a LEED Gold certification and meet NZEB (nearly zero energy building) requirements. It will have rainwater harvesting and reuse systems, photovoltaic energy production, green areas, restaurants and cafeterias, meeting and huddle rooms, digital classrooms and leisure areas, glass facades and ample spaces, amongst many other features.

Alongside, the existing Campus will be requalified. Current UCP Palma Campus grew organically since the 1960s, with additional buildings from the 70s, 80s and 90s, and some segregation between them.

The aim now is to provide the Campus with a central common ground, a 'green heart' that is easily accessible from every building, for all to enjoy and connect. This will encompass eliminating several hundred parking spaces and substituting those with green areas, filled with vegetation, shades and seating.

Throughout our other Campuses in Portugal, we are also working hard to improve the quality of our Infrastructure and overall conditions.

We know that these aren't easy processes as we have a significant legacy to take care of and improve, but we know this is the path and we are committed to reaching our destination.

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Innovation

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Communities of Change: Innovation through connected actors and shared purpose

Innovation stands as a pillar for the advancement of higher education institutions and for their ability to respond effectively to societal, scientific, and economic challenges. Innovation is frequently invoked in higher education, yet its value depends on meaning and direction. At UCP, innovation is a multidimensional endeavour grounded in purpose, driven by impact, and oriented towards positive transformation. Whether through pedagogical transformation, entrepreneurial development, collaborative research structures, or social impact projects, UCP positions innovation as a central value in its mission and strategic aspirations. For UCP, innovation is the disciplined creation of tangible value – scientific, economic, social, and human – grounded in robust knowledge, talent, and an active, deliberate relationship with society's needs. It is also understood as a collective endeavour: it happens when people, disciplines, and institutions connect with intent. Breakthroughs are more often the product of communities that share language and trust, challenge assumptions, and combine complementary strengths. In this sense, the university is not simply a place where innovation occurs, but an enabling environment – a civic and intellectual commons – where students, academics, professional staff, alumni, employers, public bodies, social organisations, investors, and local communities can work together on problems that matter. This emphasis on connected communities of actors and stakeholders is crucial to purposeful innovation: it ensures that challenges are framed with those who experience them, solutions are tested with those who will use them, and impact is assessed with those who are affected.

Innovation in education sits at the foundation of this ecosystem. When education is treated as an engine of innovation, it moves beyond content transmission and becomes a living learning network. Students cease to be passive recipients and become active participants: they learn to think critically, solve complex problems, collaborate across disciplines and cultures, communicate with clarity, and act with responsibility. These capabilities are not ancillary – because innovation depends on asking better questions, connecting diverse fields, and testing solutions with rigour and humility. UCP strives to promote pedagogical excellence through new teaching methodologies and evidence-based practices, as embodied by the *Católica Learning Innovation Lab*¹ (promotes advanced opportunities for reflection and capacity building in educational innovation by interinstitutional events) and the *Prémio de Inovação Pedagógica*² (recognises and encourages outstanding innovative teaching practices). In a world shaped by rapid technological, economic, and cultural change, educational innovation is essential. It strengthens relevance: it connects theory and practice, places real-world challenges at the centre of learning, and builds employability around durable skills – analysis, creativity, teamwork, and ethical judgement – rather than transient tools. It can improve both quality and fairness: new pedagogical approaches, digital resources, and models of lifelong learning can widen access and reduce barriers. It educates for citizenship: involving choices on what should be optimised, who benefits, and what risks are acceptable.

These dynamics become even more powerful when universities operate as part of alliances – formal and informal – across regions and borders, as internationalisation is a catalyst to innovation. University alliances create structured pathways for joint programmes, shared research infrastructures, coordinated doctoral training, and cross-institutional supervision. They also enable talent mobility: students, researchers, and professional staff moving between institutions, laboratories, companies, hospitals, cultural organisations, and public agencies. Such mobility accelerates learning, spreads good practice, and increases the likelihood that ideas will find the right ground to flourish. It also raises the quality threshold: working internationally invites comparison, deepens standards, and encourages methodological excellence. Beyond travel, mobility is also about permeability: the ability of knowledge and people to move between domains – academic, industrial, public and social – without losing coherence or integrity. Innovation with purpose requires this permeability,

since many contemporary challenges are ‘boundary problems’ that cut across health, technology, regulation, behaviour, economics, and culture. The university’s convening role is therefore essential. By creating shared spaces – research consortia, innovation labs, clinical and community partnerships, and entrepreneurial programmes – UCP strengthens the connective tissue that transforms expertise into outcomes. Collaboration should thus be deliberately designed into how problems are framed, how research and innovation are conducted, and how education is delivered.

The relationship between innovation and entrepreneurship follows naturally from this collaborative foundation. At its best, entrepreneurship is applied innovation: turning ideas into sustainable initiatives, building organisations capable of execution, and delivering solutions that address genuine needs. Yet entrepreneurial success is seldom a solo achievement; it depends on networks – mentors who accelerate judgement, peers who broaden perspective, partners who supply capabilities, early adopters who validate usefulness, and investors who finance growth. The university contributes by anchoring these relationships in a shared purpose and by helping teams develop the literacy required to work across stakeholder groups.

Entrepreneurship is central to the innovation ecosystem, supporting the development of new ventures and preparing graduates for an increasingly complex and interdisciplinary world. Concrete examples at UCP are the EIT-funded *ELEVATE* project³, designed to reinforce entrepreneurship in fields such as food biotechnology, biomedicine, artificial intelligence, and the creative industries and the *CATOLICA-LISBON Entrepreneurship Center*⁴. By aiming to transform knowledge into solutions with real impact through training, acceleration programmes and cross-sector collaborations, they illustrate practical links between academic expertise and market-oriented innovation.

Perhaps the most consequential interface between university and society arises when research is translated into real-world solutions – a demanding process of translation between environments with different incentives. On the academic side are discoveries, prototypes, methods, and evidence. On the market side are users, unmet needs, regulation, competitive dynamics, business models, and the requirements of scale. Bridging these worlds is fundamentally relational. It requires long-term partnerships; credible routes for knowledge transfer; and intermediaries who can speak both scientific and commercial languages. Where relevant,

it also requires the management of intellectual property, user validation and field testing, proofs of concept, staged financing, and the capacity to move from laboratory scale to reliable deployment. Here, innovation with impact is best judged not by promise, but by adoption.

Yet translation to market value should not imply reducing the university to a production line. University-led innovation is most valuable when it preserves ambition and integrity: producing high-quality knowledge, maintaining critical independence, and pursuing long-term benefits. Economic impact matters, but it is insufficient on its own. Social, environmental, and cultural outcomes must also be considered. Success should be assessed beyond patents or investment attracted, considering also improved well-being, more effective public services, more humane organisations, stronger communities, and credible pathways to sustainability.

This broader perspective makes social innovation central rather than peripheral. Social innovation involves designing and implementing new and effective responses to persistent societal challenges – poverty, exclusion, ageing population, migration, climate transition – while creating shared value and engaging those affected as participants, not just beneficiaries. It depends on coalitions: municipalities, schools, health providers, community leaders, enterprises, and researchers aligned around a shared theory of change and a sustained commitment. At UCP, innovation also carries a social dimension, and purpose-driven innovation is reflected in initiatives such as *ATES – Área Transversal de Economía Social*⁵ and the *Yunus Center*⁶. These engage in projects aimed at strengthening the organisational capacity of non-profit institutions and promoting social economy innovations with long-term societal benefits and for inclusive prosperity. Such work demonstrates how innovation becomes positive transformation when it is grounded in community realities, shaped by partnerships, and evaluated through outcomes that matter to people's lives.

Ultimately, the most important innovation is that which improves society without sacrificing integrity: education that better equips people to act responsibly; entrepreneurship that creates sustainable value through networks of support; research that becomes real benefit through partnerships and knowledge transfer; and social innovation that advances the common good through community-rooted alliances. UCP, as an academic community and an active participant in international

communities, is well placed to sustain such an approach – one in which innovation is not an end in itself, but a shared commitment to human value, scientific rigour, and demonstrable impact. To innovate in this sense is to shape the future together, conscientiously.

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International Students

Mahsa Farrokhi is International Student at UCP

Community, Communities: A Journey of Knowledge, Belonging, and Transformation

Universities are often described as places of learning, but for many international students they become something deeper: a home of communities, layered and interconnected, where knowledge and human experience merge. My own journey, from Iran to Portugal, and specifically to Universidade Católica Portuguesa, has shown me that community is not a fixed space, but an evolving landscape shaped by culture, belonging, academic purpose, and shared transformation. Living in Portugal for six years, studying and researching at UCP for the past three, I have learned that community is built not only through social integration but also through the empowering act of participating in knowledge creation. In this sense, my path reflects the spirit of *Transform4Europe*: to be a 'knowledge entrepreneur' capable of strengthening communities through environmental, digital, and societal transformation.

When I arrived in Portugal, I faced the challenges that many international students encounter: unfamiliar cultural practices, linguistic barriers, a different educational system, and the need to rebuild my support network from the beginning. In those early stages, community often felt like a distant concept, something I had left behind in Iran, rather than something I had yet to discover in Europe. But as I progressed through my studies, I began to recognize that community is not simply found; it is actively shaped through connections, shared goals, and openness. It is built in classrooms, laboratories, hallways, international student groups, and collaborative projects that bring people together across cultures.

My deepest sense of belonging emerged when I joined my current research group at CBQF, a research centre in Biotech at UCP, where I found not only colleagues but also mentors and friends. In the laboratory environment, where experimentation, uncertainty, and perseverance coexist, I experienced what it means to be part of a community of practice. Support from professors, guidance from supervisors, and the encouragement of peers created a sense of integration that felt both personal and academic. The lab became a space where I could contribute meaningfully, grow intellectually, and feel valued as a researcher. It was here that I first understood that community is reinforced through shared challenges and the collective pursuit of knowledge.

As a food science researcher working on new products development, plant-based innovations, and sustainable processing technologies, my academic journey has always been intertwined with societal needs. Food is one of the most universal elements of community life; it carries cultural identity, health implications, environmental impact, and economic meaning. Through my research, I contribute to an area that affects diverse communities: people with dietary restrictions, individuals seeking healthier alternatives, and populations moving toward more sustainable food systems. Scientific innovation in food processing is not merely a technical endeavour, it is a way of empowering communities to improve their well-being, reduce environmental impact, and embrace more inclusive dietary practices.

This intersection between personal growth and academic relevance is where I see the *Transform4Europe* mission most clearly reflected. The initiative emphasizes transformation in three dimensions, environmental, digital, and societal, and food science research naturally aligns with all three. Environmentally, my work involves developing sustainable ingredients and reducing processing impacts. Digitally, the scientific methodologies used in contemporary research require precise instrumentation, modelling, and data-driven analysis. Societally, plant-based innovations respond to public health demands, cultural diversity in food consumption, and the need for healthier and more accessible food products. Through these contributions, I engage in what *T4EU* calls “knowledge entrepreneurship”: using research as a tool to generate positive change within and across communities.

Yet, my understanding of community extends beyond my scientific contributions. It includes the multicultural exchange I experience every

day with classmates and fellow researchers from around the world. Each interaction – sharing traditions, discussing perspectives, engaging in collaborative work – creates small bridges between cultures. Over time, these bridges form a network of relationships that reflects the very essence of “Communities,” in the plural. Community is no longer a singular identity tied to a nation, language, or background. It becomes a mosaic of experiences, informed by the diversity of people who interact within the academic ecosystem.

In Portugal, and especially at UCP, I found that community is also shaped by how institutions support the integration of international students. My professors and supervisors have played a crucial role in helping me grow as both a researcher and a person navigating a new cultural environment. Their guidance made it possible for me to develop confidence, resilience, and a sense of direction. This support extends beyond formal academic supervision; it reflects a broader social commitment to include international researchers as full members of the university community.

Today, as I reflect on six years in Portugal and three years at UCP, I see my journey as a transformation not only of academic skills but of identity. I arrived seeking education; I found belonging. I came with scientific curiosity; I discovered the responsibility of contributing knowledge that serves communities. I expected to learn; I learned to participate. In this sense, I embody both meanings of the *T4EU Week 2026* theme: “Community. Communities.” I belong to a community, but I also help build communities – through research, collaboration, cultural exchange, and the ongoing pursuit of knowledge for the collective good.

As both a scientist and an international student, I now view community as the space where personal identity and academic purpose converge. It is where support becomes empowerment, and where knowledge becomes a shared resource. My experience confirms that community is not static but dynamic, shaped continuously by the people who inhabit it. And through the *Transform4Europe* initiative, I hope to continue contributing to communities that reflect resilience, innovation, cultural understanding, and a commitment to a better and more sustainable future.



Internationalisation

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Internationalisation: to travel and to learn

In 1426, in the Bruges Letter written by Prince D. Pedro, Duke of Coimbra, to his brother D. Duarte, the Portuguese Crown Prince, the former urges the latter to understand international realities, including those of universities. Drawing on such experience, those who must make decisions can be prepared for the world, knowing why they do – or do not – take a given course of action. This letter, a true “Treaty of Princes”, so characteristic of the Renaissance, is the basis of what I understand by internationalisation: to travel and to learn.

Internationalising is a way of living. It means recognising that every activity has an international dimension – whether in its origins or its impact – and that this dimension is always present. Everything is universal, even when we cannot perceive it.

Internationalisation should begin by identifying the talents – both tangible and intangible – that are available. These talents are the substance of internationalisation: the assets we take “out of the house” so that others may know and benefit from them.

Internationalising is a form of innovation: greater diversity in sources of knowledge enables us to go beyond the ordinary.

Internationalising, in its fullest sense, implies movement: leaving and going elsewhere – by everyone and in every area. It also entails costs, which require both funding and resilience, personally and from those around us. Internationalising is inclusive, because it is grounded in our ability to live with difference.

Internationalisation depends on leadership that brings out the best in us and energises groups with many ideas, including utopian ones.

Internationalising, however, begins at home. The people who will make it happen must have a strategy and a clear, targeted route that can be adjusted. That means doing the groundwork, so that the outcome will not be like going to the supermarket without a shopping list: we come back with many things, spend resources, but end up with a set of options (purchases) that do not suit us.

Internationalising is not a neutral stance; it involves interests and is pursued to generate reciprocal benefits. This non-neutrality provides purpose and objectives; it encourages careful attention to decisions, so that externalities are more positive than negative; and it helps ensure that no one is left behind and that everyone has a role.

Internationalising happens both bilaterally and through networks, and it is crucial that it is embedded in the institution's paradigm. It cannot be the preference of a group that may later disappear, bringing the process of internationalisation to an end.

Internationalising in the university world encompasses all of this – and more.

So where, then, is internationalisation within the university?

Everywhere – rooted in teaching and research on internationalisation, and in supporting those who join us by nurturing and creating talent. We prepare the *Homos Internationales* that we are: every person in the social, political and economic landscape, whose activity affects – and is affected by – the international context.

However, universities' role in internationalisation goes further. Their international relations both sustain and build bridges – connections and reasons to support contact between agents and entities whose relationships are fragile, and who would otherwise have no reason to connect. This bridging role, the one of Science Diplomacy, is an institutional function that mobilises knowledge, scientific practice and academic capability to promote cooperation, trust and understanding between people, communities, organisations and states. It is a cross-cutting mechanism linking science, society and public policy, driven by the university.

In summary, the international dimension means contributing – through all these dynamics and dimensions – to knowledgeable citizens who recognise that reality, the space and time in which we make decisions,

extends beyond the end of the street. It is about ensuring a more holistic vision, generating a virtuous cycle that better empowers agents and strategies and makes fuller use of everyone's talents. It is about ensuring that just decisions are made – and, in doing so, creating hope.

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European Union Science Diplomacy Alliance



Language

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Language in the mind and in the community

Languages live in the mind but belong to communities. To understand language structure, use, acquisition, and change, it is necessary to account for both the individual and the social levels, as well as their interaction. A central research question is how the cognitive processes and mental representations of individual speakers shape the social reality of language – and, conversely, how social structures and practices shape individual cognition.

Traditionally regarded as a purely formal system, the grammar of a language is in fact fully meaningful and reflects basic human experience of perceiving and acting in the world. Grammar is therefore an integral component of cognition and a foundational basis for verbal interaction and communicative efficiency. It constitutes a system of conceptual structuring that draws on general cognitive abilities – such as perception, attention, categorization, and memory – along with world knowledge and communicative processes.

Firmly grounded in linguistic use, grammar is internally heterogeneous and not uniformly shared across members of a linguistic community. This entails that the psychological reality of grammar does not coincide fully with its social reality. Methodologically, grammatical description must transcend the individual and focus on the interindividual; it must be fundamentally empirical without excluding introspection; and it must be multifactorial in order to capture the complexity and variability of grammatical phenomena.

Language in the mind

A fundamental capacity of human cognition is what Cognitive Linguistics (e.g., Wen & Taylor, 2021) refers to as *construal*: the ability to conceptualize and communicate the same situation in alternative ways. Construal is essential to meaning, grammar, and discourse. In any linguistic (and semiotic) expression, not only are the content or properties of the object of conceptualization involved, but also the perspective of the conceptualizing *subject* according to which that content is construed. Meaning is therefore intrinsically *perspectival*, and construal is an integral component of the meaning of all expressions. Given the abstract nature of grammatical meaning, one of grammar's core functions is precisely to implement construal processes, which makes grammar one of the most powerful and efficient systems of conceptual organization and construction. In discourse, construal may also serve ideological purposes. Construal relies on a diverse set of conceptual operations that are not confined to language but are also evident in other cognitive domains such as vision and attention. These operations include *schematization* – by which image schemas structure the topological and relational understanding of entities and situations – *focusing* or prominence, *perspective* (the viewing arrangement between conceptualizers and the situation, allowing for more *objective* or more *subjective* construal), and *force dynamics*, which involves relations of force and counterforce between entities, whether physical or abstract.

Additional cognitive operations include *prototype*-based *categorization*, which underlies both semantic flexibility and the efficiency of conceptual systems; *polysemy* formation through metaphor and metonymy (e.g., Silva, 2006); comparison and *metaphor*; and *intersubjectivity*, specialized as *shared intentionality* (Tomasello, 2019). Shared intentionality constitutes the basis of the evolutionary success of the human species (Enfield & Sidnell, 2022) and of our inherently social cognition.

These cognitive operations are primarily performed by speakers, although they presuppose cooperative engagement between speaker and addressee. At the same time, certain processes are predominantly carried out by the addressee and are equally essential to communicative success, most notably inferencing.

Crucially, while these cognitive operations are universal insofar as they rely on general human cognitive capacities, the outcomes of these operations vary across cultures, historical periods, and linguistic systems.

Language in the community

Linguistic meanings emerge not only from cognitive operations, but also from processes of entrenchment and conventionalization of their outcomes, as well as from mechanisms of communicative efficiency grounded in pragmatic and discursive principles.

Language is a usage-based system governed by conventions. These conventions may be maintained or altered, giving rise to variation and change, some of which may eventually become new conventions. Language change thus involves processes of convention maintenance, disruption, and diffusion, all of which are shaped jointly by cognitive and social operations.

Because it is through verbal interaction that linguistic units and structures are established, modified, entrenched, and conventionalized, communicative efficiency plays a central role. Communicative efficiency involves maximizing communicative benefits while minimizing communicative costs. Benefits correspond to the cognitive effects intended by the speaker, such as obtaining information, satisfying needs, or eliciting actions, whereas costs pertain to the articulatory and cognitive effort involved in language production.

Having identified some of the principal cognitive and social processes involved in language, it is then pertinent to examine how these processes interact. Cognitive Sociolinguistics (e.g., Geeraerts et al., 2010) provides a productive framework for this endeavour by focusing both on *variation of meaning* – particularly the interplay between conceptual and social factors in language-internal variation – and on the *meaning of variation*, that is, the cognitive reality of language variation in the minds of language users.

The Portuguese language community(ies)

Portuguese is a pluricentric language with distinct national varieties, notably European Portuguese (EP), Brazilian Portuguese (BP), and several African varieties currently undergoing processes of nativization, especially in Mozambique, Angola, and São Tomé and Príncipe. With respect to the two fully established standards, EP and BP, Portuguese represents one of the rare cases approaching symmetric pluricentricity. This situation results from a balance between the historical precedence of EP and the demographic and geographical prominence of BP, the codification of both national standards, and a growing awareness of the international

significance of Portuguese bicentricity in sociopolitical, economic, and cultural domains. However, certain asymmetries persist. The most salient concerns the high level of exposure to BP in Portugal, contrasted with the minimal or even negligible exposure to EP in Brazil. EP also functions as the reference norm in Portuguese-speaking African countries, as well as in East Timor and other Asian territories. Demographic projections indicate substantial population growth particularly in Angola and Mozambique, a trend that is likely to intensify the pluricentric nature of Portuguese and to require increasingly multilateral approaches to the management of national standards.

Our research has applied cognitive-sociolinguistic and lectometric approaches to the bicentricity of EP and BP, confirming the hypothesis of increasing divergence between the two standards over the past 75 years at lexical, grammatical, and attitudinal levels (e.g., Silva, 2025). Current work investigates the evolutionary relationships among the two established standards and the emergent African varieties, focusing on processes of nativization and the expanding pluricentricity of Portuguese. The findings of the project *Convergence and Divergence between National Varieties of Portuguese* (FCT, doi.org/10.54499/2023.16323.ICDT) have the potential to inform policies of migrant integration and inclusion in Portuguese society, as well as efforts toward the standardization of African varieties, thereby contributing to more inclusive and resilient Portuguese-speaking communities.

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Law

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Católica Law Community – Four Steps

1. The Portuguese Constitution was approved on April 2nd, 1976, and came into force on the 25th of April, two years after the democratic revolution. In this very year of 1976, in October, a young non state university – Universidade Católica Portuguesa (Católica), which had been born in 1967 – started its law community in Lisbon and enlarged this community two years after to Oporto, within the so-called Católica Humanities' School. At that time, only two other Portuguese universities – Coimbra and Lisbon – offered law courses. Due to the political, post-revolution atmosphere of the time, these latter universities were navigating through turbulent times.

The new Constitution grounds the Portuguese Republic on human dignity, grants human rights to every individual, following the International Declaration of Human Rights (1948), defines democratic and social principles, and establishes the principle of the rule of law. In the mind of the Constitutional lawmakers was a Portuguese law community very different from that of the State that came to an end with the democratic revolution. Portugal needed a strong and healthy law community to build the welfare state based on dignity, human rights and duties, and on social principles. Católica realized this was an historic opportunity and designed a broad and innovative law curriculum, with new pedagogical methods and centred on a close professor-student relation and a rigorous selection of professors. Unsurprisingly, the best students seeking a law university degree went to Católica. With no surprise, also, the first law alumni of Católica became academics, diplomats, first-tier lawyers, top members of political parties, and managers of emblematic enterprises.

2. In 1986, Portugal joined the EEC/UE. In 1989, a formally autonomous unity (the Law School) was created at Católica, with a particular focus: to build its own academic staff – trained and sharing the academic values of Católica. To that end, masters' and doctoral studies in Law were offered; and young scholars enjoyed the unique opportunity of studying and conducting their legal research abroad (particularly, in German Universities). The first PhDs at Católica Law School were defended in Lisbon (1991) and in Oporto (1993). In 1994, the first woman in Portugal to obtain a PhD in Public Law got it from Católica Law School.

Meanwhile, the higher education landscape in Portugal went through an impactful transformation, as several public and private universities were created in the 1990s, and therefore at the end of the 20th century, more than twenty LLB programmes in Law were offered in Portugal. Competition among institutions got stronger, particularly between private and public universities in Lisbon and Oporto, due to financial reasons (universities were on the same city and not far from one another, but students paid less fees in State universities). To offer a different and attractive programme, Católica Law School had to invest in quality – a very good law curriculum with attractive teaching methods, very good teachers and studying environments – and also give confidence to families and society in general through the principles that founded Católica since its very beginning. The Católica Law community worked hard and achieved this goal: Católica Law School was the first choice for best ranked high school students. This explains why, at the end of the programme, current alumni are revealed to be very well-prepared and strong simultaneously on private and public law.

When evaluation of law courses began, with national and foreign experts under the European Community principles – CNAVES was created in 1998 as the first independent Portuguese evaluation agency to ensure higher education quality, to which A3ES succeeded in 2007 – the Católica Law course was the first law course to be evaluated in Portugal and had a very good result. The Católica Law community could not have been happier.

A great number of Católica law alumni got their first job in prestigious law firms or, after a national and strict examination, were selected for a career as a judge. In the meanwhile, a dialogue between the Católica

law community and law firms became frequent, as law professors from Católica joined top tier law firms in Portugal.

But a giant step was about to be taken with the Declaration of Bologna signed in 1999, that initiated the so-called Bologna Process to create the European Higher Education Area. The idea of the Declaration of Bologna was to harmonize the different European university systems to ease student mobility and the recognition of qualifications, and to increase competitiveness for the sake of knowledge and innovation. The Católica law community had to be prepared for this new step. It had quality assurance and a three-cycle degree structure – Bachelors', Masters', and PhD – but a credit system (ECTS) had to be implemented. Moreover, the Católica law community had to foster lifelong learning and to invest in cross board cooperation.

3. Hence, the 21st century started with a profound transformation of the university system in Portugal. The Católica law community focused its work on the implementation of a credit system in a flexible and variable law curriculum, and managed to design an innovative curriculum with several strong mandatory courses, next to a set of elective courses that helped transform a five-years law degree into a better four-years one, in comparative terms with other law courses transformations. The possibility given to each student to draw their own law curriculum meant, on one hand, giving responsibility to students to choose their exclusive curriculum, and on the other hand, the responsibility of the Católica Law School, which had to provide experts for each new course. The Católica Law School offered this new curriculum in the year 2004/2005.

Cross-border cooperation and lifelong learning, also two goals of the Declaration of Bologna, came to the Católica law community in 2006, with the LLM in International Business Law, the first completely English-taught programme offered in Portugal, and designed for international students and national students that want to study abroad. In the same year, four other new and creative masters' programmes exclusively modelled for law professionals were created, whilst a new English-run LLM would soon be offered (Master in Global Legal Studies).

In 2009, the Católica Global School of Law, within the UCP Law School, was created and a new LLM with it (Law in a European and Global Context, also English-taught, with an academic faculty chosen among

the major worldwide experts). Between 2010 and 2016 all LLM's programmes of Católica Global School of Law were distinguished by the *Financial Times* as among the most innovative programmes in the world (*Financial Times Innovative Law Schools Report*).

4. In 2012, a new step for the Católica law community was taken: the Católica Research Centre for the Future of Law was born. Two years after, the Católica Research Centre was evaluated by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) with very good (2014). In 2014, an annual forum discussion on innovative law subjects began – International Graduate Legal Research Conference – with researchers from other universities, national and international, working on the same law subject for their PhDs. The aim of the discussion at this conference is to help scholars to better understand their problems and cross them over. Twelve Graduate Conferences took place from 2014 to 2025.

During this period, Católica also held the first defences in Portugal of a PhD in law written and discussed in English, and before an international jury. The first came in 2013 (European Law), the second in 2014 (Citizenship and Migration Law), the third in 2019 (Law of the Sea). Others followed suit.

In 2014, the Católica Research Centre for the Future of Law obtained, in Oporto, a Jean Monnet Chair – *Current and Future Challenges of European Integration* Project. At the same time, a Funding Platform created by the UCP Law Community, gathering a group of alumni, former and current professors, and law firms (named PAIDC), supported two multidisciplinary research projects with experts from all over the world, one on environmental law (Blue Planet Law, 2023) and another on law and artificial intelligence (Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Artificial Intelligence and the Law, 2024), both with peer review, printed by Springer, and open access available.

The Católica Research Centre for the Future of Law also created a noncomplex way of putting difficult law problems in discussion in an intergenerational scholars' environment: the *Católica Talks* take place once a month, in an informal brown bag lunch, but keeping high standards of academic discussion. They began in 2015 and became registered for history, as most of these presentations and discussions are now published as a book.

Meanwhile, in 2016, a five-year Double Degree in Law and Management, taught in Portuguese and in English, modelled by Católica Law School and Católica Porto Business School, successfully began in Oporto and continues to be unique in Portugal.

Between 2024 and 2025, the Católica Research Centre for the Future of Law was evaluated again by the FCT, this time being assessed as excellent.

In another perspective, from 2012 to 2025, the Católica law community knew other enlargements: Católica alumni went to law firms abroad and Católica Law Professors were chosen for the Constitutional Court (two were elected Vice-Presidents), the Supreme Court of Justice (one was also elected Vice-President) and the Administrative Supreme Court (one was also elected Vice-President). From 2012 to 2016, a UCP Law Professor was the Rector of Católica. Finally, since June 2025, the Prime-Minister and several Ministers of the Portuguese Government, including the Minister of Justice, belong to the Católica law community.



Leadership

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Leadership: The Performance of the Community

The collective is the rationale for leadership – only apparently is this core of leadership paradoxical. Leadership, like other aspects of human experience, is marked by biases. In leadership, one such bias favours men over women. Yet, another, more subtle, privileges the leader rather than the group or community. Language is an illustrative example. Calling members of the group ‘followers’ is hardly a motivating or dignifying expression. Nonetheless, leadership is precisely about groups and communities.

Like many social phenomena, leadership was invented by no one: it emerged among human beings – indeed, among living beings – millions of years ago. Evolutionary theories of leadership¹ show that leadership predates the human species. It is a phenomenon present in most social dynamics of living organisms: in ants and fish, in lions, birds, and monkeys. Other animals, such as buffalo or cattle, live in herds without leaders. At times, they pay a heavy price for that: decisionmaking is slow, exploratory movements take time, they often choose too late which route to take, and many die. It may well be that the underlying reason why, throughout history, led groups prevailed over leaderless groups lies in the speed of decisionmaking – one being taking one decision for the whole group. The speed of decision compensates for the errors of decisions. Amazon’s leadership principles² mirror this aspect, highlighting the importance of not delaying decisions, because hesitation clogs the

¹ Van Vugt, M. and Ahuja, A. (2010) *Selected: why some people lead, why others follow and why it matters*. London: Profile Books

² <https://amazon.jobs/content/en/our-workplace/leadership-principles>, ‘bias for action’ leadership principle.

organisation, reduces productivity, and – crucially – because most wrong decisions can be reversed easily and without major cost.

Thus, the question becomes: if someone decides, will he/she be followed? Does he/she motivate and inspire others? Does he/she provide security and confidence? Leadership is never effective when it rests primarily on hierarchical position. Example, courage, the ability to take risks and to decide, technical competence, empathy, and relational skills are always important dimensions of a leader's practice.

In a passage from Shakespeare's *Henry IV*,³ the rebel Glendower talks with Henry Percy as they conspire against the king. Each, with his own agenda for power, mocks the other, each implying he possesses greater powers than the other and that he can achieve more. Glendower boasts to Percy: "I can call spirits from the vasty deep!" Percy replies, downplaying the remark and drawing attention to something fundamental about leadership: "Why, so can I, or so can any man... But will they come when you do call for them?" To lead is to be followed.

Why is a leader followed? Scientific research on leadership has shown that there are competent individuals who do not lead effectively – who are not easily followed. They do not decide, do not inspire, do not take risks, do not set an example, and shy away from change. At the centre of leadership dynamics, as Freud⁴ suggested, lies the emotional bond – the emotions that the leader can evoke within the community, the engagement and identification that groups develop with the leader's vision and example.

For many thousands of years, oratorical skill has been viewed as an indicator of intelligence and potential for leadership. In a world without information – a largely unknown world – speaking well and explaining situations clearly could be decisive for a group's survival; it amounted to influence. This trait persists today. Indeed, in a world saturated with information, uncertainty also persists. Good communicators continue to be perceived as good leaders. Leadership correlates positively with extroversion – sociability, the ability to get along with others, and working easily and effectively in communities. Openness to new experiences also enhances leadership effectiveness. After all, to lead is to go ahead, to anticipate, to initiate something new. On the contrary, nervousness is

3 Shakespeare, William (2005) *Henry IV, Part One*. International Edition. London: Penguin

4 Freud, Sigmund (1991) "Group Psychology and the Analysis of Ego" in *Civilization, Society and Religion* Vol. 12. London: Penguin

poorly aligned with leadership; who wishes to be led by someone who is visibly anxious?

In our time, constantly immersed in thousands of stories, being able to attract attention increases one's influence. Following those in the spotlight is an ancient behaviour, which Van Vugt⁵ argues dates to the Stone Age, when following the right leaders literally meant survival. For this reason, even today, widespread attention tends to be interpreted as a signal that a person is worth following.

For decades, leadership studies have moved away from personality and from the old idea of innate leadership – of those who are “born to lead.” Personality, of course, matters. Yet distinct personalities can lead effectively, and people with similar personalities may perform very differently in leadership roles. Moreover, research⁶ shows that personality changes over the course of life for at least one third of the individuals.

A leader may behave in many ways: focusing on tasks, deadlines, and details; being concerned with technical competence (their own and that of others); paying close attention to budgets; or being preoccupied with power, roles, and positions. Many behaviours can be displayed by leaders, but research suggests that only two behavioural patterns are consistently effective: a constant focus on tasks, details, deadlines, and objectives; and a sustained focus on good relationships – empathy, listening, and involving others.

Each of us might find one of these dimensions easier than the other. Those with a Type A personality – driven by urgency, goalorientation, and competitiveness – tend to become taskoriented leaders. Those with a Type B personality – focused on harmony and empathy – tend to become relationshiporiented leaders. Both types of leaders can be effective; yet sometimes they are not. High motivation is futile if objectives are not met. And, at times, intense pressure to achieve objectives is precisely what causes failure. For a great deal, leadership effectiveness is situational.

If the core and justification of leadership lie in the group, its essence may well be this: will you be followed? Why is a leader followed? Because he/she knows more, some will argue; because he/she is technically competent. Yes and no: many competent people are unable to lead; they do not decide, they lack courage, they set no example, or they simply do

5 Van Vugt and Ahuja (2010) *Selected: why some people lead, why others follow and why it matters*. London: Profile Books

6 The Longevity Project, <https://www.longevity-project.com/>, Jan 26th 2026

not wish to lead. Others argue that a leader is followed because he/she takes risks. This is important, but excessive risktaking often makes a bad leader. Some situations demand careful deliberation rather than boldness. Still others claim that a leader is followed because he/she engages their team, motivates them, and recognises their value. Undeniably important – yet without technical competence, decisionmaking, and the willingness to confront problems, those aspects might be insufficient.

Who, then, is the best leader? It depends. It depends on the situation, the organisation, the objectives, the activity, the professionals who work with the leader, their capabilities, and their motivation. In *The Art of War*, the 2,500-year-old Chinese treatise by Sun Tzu,⁷ we read that one never knows who will become the best leader: “How will the terrain of battle be? How will the weather be? What will be the morale of our troops and those of the enemy? Who will decide better and faster? Many are the uncertainties...” Yet, Sun Tzu concludes, “the worst leader is not difficult to recognise... it is always someone very courageous... and very incompetent. He is the one who most swiftly leads to disaster.”

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7 Sun Tzu (1995) *The Art of War*. New York: Westview



Library

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Libraries for Community

University libraries are living organisms shaped over the years by the needs and expectations of their respective academic communities. This complex mutation and constant dynamism have revealed a strong capacity for adaptation among their professionals, in a permanent effort to acquire and confer skills in information and digital literacy, as well as to provide value-added resources and services for their users. Their work translates into a continuous flow focused on opportunities and challenges to promote greater quality and equity in knowledge creation and knowledge-sharing systems, while considering the heterogeneity of their agents and the dangers posed by global-scale misinformation.

The role of libraries is even more challenging in times of greater uncertainty, when trust in the political, economic, and social order is constantly being questioned and renegotiated. In this sense, libraries take on a role that clearly transcends the transactional context of information and scientific knowledge, asserting themselves as promoters of inclusive contexts and the development of resilient structures in which users, each in their own way, will anchor themselves. To achieve these goals, the physical and digital spaces managed by libraries are regularly adapted, enabling new dynamics and activities, and welcoming an increasingly diverse range of profiles, cultures, methodologies, and collaborative practices in a context of growing interdisciplinarity. Ultimately, a truly universal space where communities and subcommunities with very different dimensions and characteristics converge.

More recently, in a phenomenon that cuts across virtually all contexts, libraries have realized the importance of keeping pace with the implementation of Artificial Intelligence, supporting their users in

the adoption of new tools and structures for creating knowledge, while ensuring high ethical standards, respect for privacy and uniqueness, and the conscious use of data and information resources present in these models. Although the new paradigm imposed by Artificial Intelligence is particularly disruptive, it is yet another example of how libraries accept technological challenges, implementing platforms, exploring new tools, and driving global ecosystems based on interoperable standards, promoting the creation of communities at various levels and reliable knowledge structures on an unprecedented scale.

Another example that illustrates the versatility of higher education libraries and the critical role they continue to play in their communities, both in a narrow and broad sense, is their involvement in the primary goals of Open Science, namely Open Access, through the management of institutional repositories and other scientific information and publication management platforms, or even support and awareness-raising among researchers to ensure compliance with institutional policies and guidelines of funding bodies. It is also increasingly evident that libraries are actively involved in national and international communities and working groups covering other topics such as research data management, the promotion of citizen science, or the creation and sharing of open educational resources, among others, as part of a transformative movement stimulated by practical communities that promote greater democratization in the creation and sharing of scientific knowledge.

We can also see that higher education libraries recognize the importance of actively engaging in global movements to create more sustainable and socially responsible contexts. Libraries have been firmly committed to promoting and aligning themselves with the Sustainable Development Goals, both individually and in partnership with other services, and within and outside institutions. Some concrete actions aim at adopting environmental protection measures, rational and more efficient management of information resources, or raising awareness among their respective communities of the need to exercise more active and conscious citizenship.

The mission of establishing and supporting communities that share more or less specific motivations, which has gradually become structural for higher education libraries, is also reflected in the type of activities developed, with particular emphasis on cultural dynamics, encompassing not only scientific events, but also those that stimulate

a sense of belonging, inclusion, breaking isolation, combating uncertainty and anxiety, through the creation of networks that ensure functional structures and communities, even in particularly adverse circumstances, such as the pandemic or the escalation of armed conflicts that motivate, in particular, strong migratory flows. For this reason, there is a growing reflection on the spaces managed by libraries, enabling them to accommodate a different, more inclusive, and flexible reality and thus respond to current and future challenges.

In light of the above, it is clear that libraries play a strategic role in their communities, not only in a more historical dimension associated with teaching, but also in the fields of research, social responsibility, and the defence and preservation of the way of life that characterizes our societies, while still adapting to global contexts, where geography is less relevant. The sense of belonging materializes in multiple forms, through various channels, with different purposes. This will undoubtedly remain a central challenge for libraries: developing a strategy that accommodates a multiplicity of increasingly complex realities in a context of great unpredictability and constant transformation across multiple dimensions. To be part of an alliance such as *Transform4Europe*, particularly through a working group dedicated primarily to stimulating coordination between the libraries of various universities, is a unique opportunity to provide each member of this large extended community with an unprecedented set of resources and services, accompanied by a reflective process and the creation of a joint vision that anticipates individual and collective needs, which unequivocally contributes to the training of individuals with a critical sense and a sense of urgency in the face of the contextual and global challenges we face, keeping higher education libraries, as they always have been, at the centre of their communities' activities.



Longevity

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Living to 100: The impact of Longevity on Business, Workforce, and Learning

Longevity is one of the most profound structural transformations shaping contemporary economies and societies. Far from being a marginal issue linked only to ageing or retirement, longevity reflects a fundamental reconfiguration of how long we live, how we work, how we consume, and how we organize our institutions. Life expectancy has increased dramatically over the past century, while birth rates have declined in most developed economies, leading to a rapidly ageing population and a shrinking younger generation. As Peter Drucker anticipated more than two decades ago, the demographic balance of societies is being radically altered, with significant consequences for markets, organizations, and individuals.

Importantly, longevity is not synonymous with ageing. Ageing is a gradual process, not an event that suddenly occurs at a predefined chronological threshold. Longevity invites us to rethink the entire life course, from education to work, from consumption to retirement. It calls for what has been described by the Stanford Center on Longevity as a “new map of life” in which linear models are replaced by more flexible, multi-stage trajectories.

Longevity as a Business Opportunity

From a market perspective, longevity profoundly reshapes the consumer landscape. By 2050, more than one-third of European consumers will be aged 65 or over, while the proportion of those under 30 will have declined significantly. This demographic shift is already transforming

demand patterns, purchasing power distribution, and consumption preferences.

Several industries are directly and deeply impacted. Healthcare and pharmaceuticals are at the forefront, responding to increased demand for medical services, prevention, and solutions that extend not only lifespan but 'healthspan'. Yet the impact of longevity goes far beyond healthcare. Fashion, hospitality, education, banking, and insurance are all being re-shaped by the rise of older consumers with substantial purchasing power.

The so-called "silver or longevity economy" challenges persistent stereotypes. Older consumers are not a homogeneous or passive group; they are diverse, active, and increasingly demanding. In fashion, for example, the 50+ segment already represents nearly half of market growth and is expected to account for half of total demand by 2050. Brands that recognize this shift – by adapting products, representations, and marketing narratives – are better positioned to capture long-term growth. More broadly, companies must critically assess who their customers are, how much value older segments represent, and whether their strategies and investments adequately reflect this reality.

Longevity and the Workforce

Longevity also transforms labour markets and talent dynamics. Across Europe, employment rates among older workers are rising, while the relative size of younger cohorts entering the workforce is declining. Between 2010 and 2030, the number of workers aged 55–64 is expected to increase substantially, while younger age groups contract. This shift challenges organizations that continue to rely on outdated assumptions about career length, productivity, and retirement.

Contrary to widespread ageist beliefs, research shows that productivity does not necessarily decline with age – particularly in service-based and knowledge-intensive sectors. Experience, judgment, and relational skills often increase over time, and older workers tend to contribute significantly through mentoring, collaboration, and knowledge sharing. Studies consistently demonstrate that mixed-age teams outperform age-homogeneous teams, especially in complex problem-solving, innovation, and creative tasks.

Yet ageism remains pervasive in organizational practices. Older workers are often disadvantaged in recruitment, promotion, training, and

performance evaluations. Addressing longevity therefore requires not only demographic awareness but also cultural and managerial change. Organizations must redesign talent strategies to value experience, foster intergenerational collaboration, and invest in continuous learning across all ages.

From Education to Lifelong Learning

Longevity fundamentally alters the role of education institutions. The traditional model – education at the beginning of life followed by uninterrupted work and eventual retirement – is increasingly obsolete. Longer lives imply longer and more varied careers, making lifelong learning, upskilling, and reskilling essential.

Universities are uniquely positioned to respond to this challenge. Beyond educating young adults, they can serve as hubs for multigenerational learning, mentoring, and experimentation. Programmes targeting midlife transitions, executive education for experienced professionals, and initiatives that connect students with older learners reflect an emerging shift from education as a one-time investment to education as a lifelong companion.

At an individual level, longevity forces a reconsideration of career planning, retirement, and personal development. If people live longer, they may need – and want – to remain economically and socially active for more years. This raises critical questions about second or even third careers, often in fields such as consulting, teaching, coaching, mentoring, or non-executive roles.

Preparing for a longer life extends beyond professional skills. Health, financial security, and social connections become central pillars of long-term resilience. Longevity thus becomes not only an economic or organizational issue, but a deeply personal one, shaping how individuals envision purpose, contribution, and balance over extended lifespans.

Conclusion

Longevity is not a distant trend; it is a present reality with far-reaching implications. It reshapes economies, markets, organizations, talent management, and individual life choices. The central challenge is not simply to live longer, but to live – and work – better for longer. Companies, leaders, and individuals that proactively adapt their models, mindsets,

and strategies will be better equipped to thrive in this new 100-year life era. The business world needs to adjust from a market, talent and learning perspective!

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Management

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Community as a Regenerative Force: Leadership for Sustainability in a University Ecosystem

Universities have long been described as communities of knowledge, practice, and belonging. Yet in an era marked by ecological crises, societal fragmentation, and technological acceleration, this traditional understanding is no longer sufficient. Communities today must also be capable of *transformation* – able not only to learn about the world, but to regenerate the systems upon which life, prosperity, and justice depend. As co-leader of the Innovation in Sustainability and Regeneration hub (InSuRe.hub)¹ and responsible for the Transformational Leadership Work Package that led the recent workshop held at Católica Porto, I have witnessed how a university can become a living ecosystem of regenerative leadership: a community that develops leaders who, in turn, create and mobilize communities for sustainable transformation.

The *Transform4Europe* alliance positions “Community. Communities” as the central theme of its 2026 Week. This dual formulation – singular and plural – captures the paradox of modern universities: we are one community, but we exist *through* many communities. The institutional ‘we’ only becomes meaningful when it embraces the multiplicity of actors, networks, and disciplines that converge in and around the university. This plurality is not a weakness; it is a generative strength. The goal, then, is not to dissolve diversity into homogeneity, but to orchestrate it toward shared purpose. In sustainability transitions, this purpose is clear:

¹ For more information about InSuRe.hub, see the website here: <https://www.ucp.pt/insurehub/about?msite=2>

enabling societies to thrive within planetary boundaries while fostering human dignity, resilience, and flourishing (Laszlo and Brown, 2014).

This is the vision that guides *InSuRe.hub*, a transdisciplinary initiative nurtured by Universidade Católica Portuguesa through Católica Porto Business School and the Faculty of Biotechnology. From the outset, the Hub has positioned itself not as a project but as an *ecosystem*: a space where faculties, researchers, companies, business clusters, municipalities, entrepreneurs, policy actors, and youth collaborate to develop strategic sustainability journeys, disruptive innovations, literacy programs, and transformative education. This approach reflects an understanding deeply aligned with contemporary regenerative thinking (Reed, 2007): communities are not static collections of individuals but dynamic living systems, capable of adaptation, creativity, and emergence.

This systems view shaped the workshop we organized under the Transformational Leadership Programme of *Transform4Europe*. Grounded in frameworks such as Wayne Visser's (2022) "six transitions to thriving" and the principles of systems thinking, the workshop emphasized that leadership for sustainability cannot be reduced to technical skill or compliance-oriented management. It requires a shift in mindset – from linear to circular reasoning, from reductionist problem-solving to holistic understanding, from short-term optimisation to long-term stewardship. Crucially, it requires leaders who recognise that no organisation, no institution, no individual transforms alone. Transformation is a *collective act*.

This is where the dual theme of "Community. Communities" gains its deepest meaning. Leadership for sustainability is inherently relational. It is less about authority than about catalysis: creating the conditions for others to act, connect, collaborate, and imagine new possibilities. In practice, this means mobilising employees and value-chain partners; engaging citizens and youth; building partnerships across sectors; and crafting a shared language that enables alignment toward regenerative goals. During the workshop, participants from diverse contexts – academic, corporate, civic – reflected on how leadership emerges not through solitary brilliance but through networks of trust, shared values, and reciprocal learning.

Within *InSuRe.hub*, we see this repeatedly. Whether working with companies on regenerative strategies, supporting business clusters on circular innovation, co-creating programmes with international universities, or collaborating with schools to build sustainability literacy,

progress happens when communities coalesce around a vision of future prosperity that includes businesses, employees, local communities, and the planet. The role of the university is not simply to provide expertise, but to host and nurture this collective intelligence. The university becomes an integrative membrane through which ideas, people, and practices flow – translating science into action, and action into renewed inquiry.

This relational and regenerative perspective also reshapes leadership development. Instead of training individuals to be “sustainability experts,” we cultivate leaders who can understand complexity, design with circularity, embrace diversity and creativity, align their organisations with societal purpose, and anticipate emerging patterns of change. These are not merely competencies; they are capabilities of community-building. A leader who operates with systemic coherence will naturally mobilize others. A leader who embraces creativity will naturally invite diversity. A leader who prioritises continuity and resilience will naturally strengthen institutional and social fabrics.

In this sense, leadership for sustainability is a community practice. It is learned in community, enacted in community, and oriented toward the well-being of communities. The workshop made this explicit: participants did not only gain conceptual tools, but also experienced the value of interdisciplinary dialogue, shared reflection, and co-creation. They left with a deeper awareness that transformation is both personal and collective. As one participant noted, “It is impossible to lead sustainability without being embedded in a network of relationships that sustains the leader.”

The challenge ahead for universities like ours – and for alliances such as *Transform4Europe* – is to deepen and extend these communities of transformation. This involves continuing to break traditional silos; strengthening partnerships with companies, municipalities, and societal organisations; engaging students as co-creators rather than recipients; and embracing new modalities of learning that integrate science, technology, ethics, and imagination. It also requires institutional courage: the willingness to model the kind of regenerative practices we teach, from ecological footprint reduction to inclusive governance and digital responsibility.

Reflecting on my experience co-leading *InSuRe.hub* and guiding this leadership programme within *T4EU*, I am convinced that universities can become powerful regenerative ecosystems. They can be places where individuals are empowered, where organisations find strategic

clarity, where youth discover purpose, and where communities – local and international – co-create pathways for a thriving future. The plural communities we gather are the fabric of our singular community as a university. Ultimately, this is what makes transformation possible: a shared commitment to learning, serving, and regenerating together.

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Marketing

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Community; Communities: The Transformative Role of Marketing

Marketing is often associated with the fulfilment of shallow, materialistic, and artificially created needs. This perception is profoundly mistaken.

Marketers are the professionals who define strategies and implement processes that lead to the creation and development of brands, ideas, or causes. In the business world, a strong brand is one that enjoys high awareness among its target audience and is clearly associated with benefits and attributes that meet both the physical and/or emotional needs of that group. A brand adds value beyond the intrinsic product itself and represents one of a company's greatest assets. This 'goodwill' is well illustrated by the statement attributed to former Coca-Cola CEO Roberto C. Goizueta: *"All of our plants and equipment could be destroyed and in a few years our company would be back on top because of its brand."*

This added value enables business growth, job creation, competitive salaries, and conditions that foster creativity and innovation, which ultimately reinforce brand strength. This virtuous loop ensures the sustainability of any company and the aspirations of its community, made up of customers, employees, families, and other stakeholders. None of this is superficial or insignificant when grounded in solid ethical principles and guided by a vision of the common good.

However, this concept extends beyond the transactional logic and should also be applied by nonprofit organizations and social causes. In a world characterized by scarce resources, and in which we are constantly overstimulated, the promoters of an idea or cause should use marketing

principles and methodologies. A brand, idea, or cause can be clearly and distinctively positioned in the minds of a community by focussing efforts on a shared objective.

We can recall diverse examples of brands and causes: Martin Luther King Jr., unequivocally associated with the fight against racism and the powerful headline *"I Have a Dream"*; Volvo, top of mind in the automotive safety segment, with its signature *"For Life"*; or McDonald's with its promise of *"Simple Joy"* and the signature *I'm Lovin' It*. In each case, clear positioning and consistent practice with what is promised created strong, memorable 'brands'.

Universities have evolved beyond their traditional role of transmitting academic knowledge. Today, they play an active role in promoting values and building a society centred on human dignity, justice, and sustainability, through research focussed on the common good and providing holistic education that combines knowledge, critical thinking, and the will to transform.

"Community; Communities" the theme of *Transform 4 Europe Week*, created by Universidade Católica Portuguesa as the host institution, is a clear expression of this mission. It reflects the need to strengthen the academic community around the common good and act as a transformative agent in both local and global communities. This concept is consistent with the Universidade Católica's mission, vision, and strategy, embodied in its signature *"The Value of Values"*. This 360-degree vision of the institution is perceived as genuine by stakeholders because it is grounded in principles that are part of the university's DNA, present in its daily activities, the values it promotes, the medium and long-term objectives it defines and pursues.

Practices such as Service-Learning pedagogy illustrate this commitment. As our President, Isabel Capelo Gil, stated at the *VI Global Symposium Uniservitate*:

"At Católica, we see Service-Learning not only as a pedagogical innovation, but as a way of embodying our mission: to educate citizens with purpose, connect academic knowledge to real social needs, and strengthen our commitment to the common good."

Another example is the scholarship program for refugees, which covers full undergraduate tuition. This is the case of Owais Sadek, a

Syrian student, who stated:

“Fortunately, Universidade Católica saved me from that darkness by granting me a scholarship in the field I most wanted to study, Social and Cultural Communication,” adding that “these scholarships serve as a free ticket for a journey that ends in optimism and promotes the building of bridges between the nationalities of these students and the local community.”

These are just some of many practices designed not to gain positive publicity, but to create real impact, based on a belief in their future multiplier effect. An effect that is already global, through our extensive alumni network, whose members act and make a difference around the world, guided by the spirit and values of Universidade Católica.

To bring the theme “*Community; Communities*” to life, marketing must act beyond communication. It must be a structuring element in creating message and meaning capable of attracting attention and intention; ensuring the efficient allocation of resources to strategic activities; and fostering meaning, belonging, and real impact.

This perspective highlights the university as a transformative agent, capable of positively influencing behaviours, mindsets, and social structures. It is capable of changing lives by giving voice to causes and values that go beyond academic results. Marketing activity should inspire students, alumni, researchers, and staff, reinforcing their role as agents of change. This work begins with the visual identity developed, which conveys the theme through the idea of a “community of communities,” where different groups are united around a shared purpose.

We invite you to join this experience in the wonderful city of Lisbon for T4EU Week. Together, let us create real change within ourselves, in our academic community, and in the several communities that know us so well.

Welcome to the Universidade Católica Portuguesa.



Medicine

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Building the Community at Católica Medical School

Medicine is, at its very core, a vocation centred on community. Every professional involved in healthcare – whether in direct patient contact or in ensuring that the healthcare system functions effectively – ultimately works for the benefit of both the individual patient and the wider community.

Communitarian philosophy is so deeply ingrained in medicine that the very *modus operandi* of healthcare is inherently collaborative. Diagnosis, management decisions, and patient follow-up are carried out by multidisciplinary teams, in which professionals with diverse expertise combine their knowledge for the maximum benefit of the patient. This collaborative approach has become the gold standard in patient care. Healthcare, therefore, must be delivered by communities of professionals rather than by isolated individuals.

It is essential that this culture of collaboration is fostered from the very beginning of medical training. At Católica Medical School, the entire educational philosophy is designed to cultivate a medical community that works for the benefit of society as a whole. This begins with the teaching methodology itself: Problem-Based Learning. This approach encourages students to work in teams, with each member contributing their knowledge, experiences, and findings in order to solve the problem presented. In this way, knowledge and competencies are developed beyond individual capacity and effort. The collective contributes to each individual's growth, allowing students to experience firsthand the added value of teamwork and shared learning.

Building on this communitarian foundation, medical education must

extend beyond the classroom and engage with the broader social and professional communities. Community is not only something future physicians serve; it is something they must actively belong to, understand, and help sustain. Through communitarian activities, interprofessional collaboration, particularly with the school of nursing, participation in healthcare promotion and screening programs, medical students are progressively integrated into a living healthcare ecosystem, learning to practice medicine *with* the community rather than merely *for* it.

Communitarian activities within medical education provide a crucial bridge between theoretical knowledge and lived social reality. By engaging with local communities through outreach initiatives, service-learning projects, and public health interventions, students meet the social determinants of health firsthand. This moves students away from a purely disease-centred model of care toward a more holistic, person-centred approach. Community-based activities reinforce the idea that effective healthcare emerges from partnership rather than unilateral action.

Early collaboration between medical and nursing students fosters mutual respect, breaks down professional barriers, and cultivates a shared language of care. When students learn together, they gain a deeper understanding of each profession's unique contributions and responsibilities, as well as the importance of collaborative decision-making. This mirrors real-world healthcare settings, where effective patient care depends on seamless cooperation among diverse professionals.

Healthcare promotion and screening programmes offer particularly powerful opportunities for communitarian learning. These programmes emphasize prevention, early detection, and population-level impact. Through direct involvement, students come to understand that medicine is not solely about treating disease but also about preventing illness and promoting well-being. Moreover, these activities highlight the ethical responsibility of the medical profession to reduce health disparities and to reach vulnerable or underserved populations.

Crucially, these communitarian experiences contribute to the development of professional identity. Medical students do not become physicians solely by acquiring knowledge and technical skills; they become physicians by internalizing the values, responsibilities, and ethical commitments of the profession. Working within communities, alongside other healthcare professionals, and in service of public health

allows students to see themselves as members of a collective with a shared mission. This sense of belonging counteracts the individualism and competitiveness that can sometimes characterize medical training and replaces it with solidarity, shared purpose, and mutual support.

The institutional role in fostering this culture cannot be overstated. When medical schools intentionally design curricula that prioritize community engagement, interprofessional collaboration, and service, they send a clear message about what it means to be a doctor. At Católica Medical School, the emphasis on Problem-Based Learning, teamwork, and community-oriented activities reflects a coherent educational philosophy: medicine is learned and practiced within communities. Students are encouraged not only to excel individually but also to contribute to the learning and well-being of others. In doing so, the school itself becomes a microcosm of the healthcare system it seeks to serve – a community dedicated to the common good.

Furthermore, communitarian education has implications for physician well-being and resilience. A strong sense of community has been shown to mitigate burnout, enhance professional satisfaction, and promote reflective practice. When students learn to rely on their peers, to collaborate across disciplines, and to engage meaningfully with patients and communities, they develop support networks that endure beyond training. These networks are essential in a profession that often deals with high emotional and ethical demands. Community, therefore, is not only a means of improving patient care but also a protective factor for healthcare professionals themselves.

Community is not an abstract ideal in medicine; it is a practical, lived reality that must be cultivated intentionally throughout medical education. Communitarian philosophy underpins the organization of healthcare, the delivery of patient care, and the formation of professional identity. Through communitarian activities, collaboration with nursing schools, and participation in healthcare promotion and screening programmes, medical students learn to be part of a community, to serve a community, and to grow within a community. These experiences shape physicians who are not only clinically competent but also socially responsible, collaborative, and deeply attuned to the needs of the populations they serve. In reaffirming community as a central value, medical education lays the foundation for a more humane, effective, and sustainable healthcare system.



Mental Health

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Tolerance, Tolerances, Complicity

Mental health has become a visible and widely endorsed theme within contemporary universities. This essay explores how mental health is shaped by relationships and silence in academic communities, in line with the *T4EU* Week 2026 theme “Community. Communities”, which highlights the role of universities in empowering diverse communities and prospectively shaping collective life.

Funding, institutional strategies, awareness campaigns, and support services increasingly signal a formal commitment to mental health and well-being. At the level of discourse, concern for mental health has become almost unavoidable. Yet visibility should not be confused with protection. In everyday academic life, there is often a sharp disconnect between what institutions and individuals claim to value and the ways people treat one another. This disconnect is not incidental but is sustained through daily practices that are rarely questioned.

Mental health does not reside solely within individuals. It is actively shaped through relationships. It exists in classrooms and offices, in corridors and online meetings, in emails, and silences. Academic communities are not neutral environments in which individual vulnerabilities simply unfold. They are relational systems that continuously produce conditions of safety or harm. Long before anyone seeks professional support, mental health is already being influenced by what is permitted, rewarded, ignored, or silenced.

Responsibility is often attributed primarily to structures: competitive cultures, productivity demands, precarious employment, or rigid hierarchies. These forces matter and should not be minimised. However, they do not operate independently of individual action. Structures are

enacted through people. Mental health within academic communities is therefore shaped not only by systems, but by the everyday decisions of those who inhabit them. Every member of a community contributes, actively or passively, to climates that either protect psychological well-being or steadily undermine it. Responsibility, in this sense, is shared, but never diluted.

There is an uncomfortable reality that frequently goes unaddressed in academic communities: harm is often inflicted by peers. In different moments (e.g., competition, perceived threat), some individuals may undermine others not through overt hostility, but through scrutiny, questioning of competence, or subtle disparagement (even when they have the least legitimacy to do so). These actions are often framed as professionalism or rigour. Such behaviours may seem small or isolated, yet they resonate within the community, affecting not only the target but also shaping what others perceive as acceptable. Their psychological impact can be deep and lasting, influencing self-confidence, sense of belonging, and emotional well-being.

Harm rarely occurs in isolation. Those who witness these actions yet remain silent (to protect themselves or avoid conflict) implicitly endorsing the behaviour. As Pope Francis reminds us in *Fratelli Tutti*, “When conflicts are not resolved but kept hidden or buried in the past, silence can lead to complicity in grave misdeeds and sins.” In academic communities, this idea resonates: unaddressed harmful actions and silence can reinforce the power of those who act and leave others exposed and unsupported. For those directly affected, the absence of intervention can be as damaging as the original act, reinforcing isolation and confirming that protection will not come.

Through such silence harm becomes normalised. When behaviours are not named, when discomfort is avoided, and when responsibility is consistently displaced, psychological safety deteriorates. Over time, people adapt, not by becoming resilient, but by becoming quieter, smaller, and less present. Mental health, in these contexts, is not abruptly broken, it is slowly worn down. This erosion aligns with the idea of a mental health continuum, in which people can languish or flourish depending on how far their environments support positive functioning, even when no formal mental disorder is present (Keyes, 2002).

A community that claims to care about mental health must be prepared to confront these dynamics directly. This does not require

eliminating disagreement or conflict, which are integral to academic life. It does require refusing to disguise harm as normal practice and resisting cultures in which silence is valued over accountability. Precisely here, what organisational psychology terms “psychological safety” becomes essential: the shared belief that one can speak up against harmful behaviours, admit limitations, or intervene without fear of retaliation, a fear that eventually makes people afraid of everything (Edmondson, 1999).

Universities occupy a distinctive position in this process. As formative environments, they shape not only knowledge production, but also ethical orientations and relational norms. They are spaces in which future professionals, leaders, and citizens learn what is acceptable, what is rewarded, and what can be ignored. What academic communities tolerate does not remain confined within institutional walls, since it is carried forward into wider social and professional contexts. Within European alliances such as Transform4Europe, these questions acquire an additional dimension, as universities collectively explore how to design academic cultures that actively protect, rather than quietly erode, mental health.

Ultimately, academic communities are defined not by what they declare, but by how they act. Mental health is shaped daily through interactions and responses to harm, not solely through policies or support structures. When silence replaces responsibility, psychological safety gets eroded. A genuine commitment requires collective accountability: what communities ignore or excuse does not just reflect their values, it actively shapes their consequences.

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Microbiology

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The language of communities: microorganisms as an inspirational model

Communities can be conceptualized as concentric and overlapping rings that together form a complex, deeply interconnected assemblage.

In biology, a community is understood as a collection of diverse living organisms, each of which both gives to and receives from others. These interactions underpin the stability and functionality of the system as a whole. When considering the nature of microbial communities, it becomes almost inevitable to draw parallels with human societies and social communities. In both systems, collective stability and functionality emerge from shared organizing principles, including cooperation, communication, dynamic balance, the management of conflict, and the capacity for cohesion and resilience.

Studying microbial interactions can inspire approaches in human organizational design, from public health strategies to collaborative work environments.

It is through **cooperation** that microorganisms enhance their survival and functionality, establishing structured and persistent communities. Rather than acting as isolated individuals, microbes frequently engage in cooperative strategies such as metabolic cross-feeding, in which the by-products of one organism serve as resources for others. This division of labour allows communities to exploit complex substrates that no single species could process alone. Cooperation is also evident in the formation of biofilms, where cells produce shared extracellular matrices that provide protection against environmental stress, antimicrobial agents,

and host defences. While only some organisms invest in producing these structures, many benefit from them. Although cooperation entails costs at the individual level, it often yields collective benefits that increase community stability, efficiency, and resilience.

Just as microbial communities thrive through collective effort and division of labour, human societies depend on cooperation and shared responsibilities to achieve stability and progress.

Communication in microbial communities enables microorganisms to coordinate behaviour and respond collectively to external changes. This communication is primarily mediated through chemical signalling molecules that allow cells to sense the presence, density, and activity of neighbouring organisms. One well-studied example is quorum sensing, a mechanism through which microbes regulate gene expression in response to population size, synchronizing behaviours such as biofilm formation, virulence, and resource utilization. This is a very smart and efficient way of saving energy and resources. Communication also facilitates cooperation by aligning individual actions with community-level needs and by preventing premature or inefficient responses. Beyond intraspecies signalling, many microbial communities rely on interspecies communication, allowing diverse organisms to coexist and adapt within shared environments. Disruptions in communication can destabilize communities, leading to uncoordinated behaviour and reduced functionality.

The chemical signalling that coordinates microbial behaviour mirrors how effective communication underpins coordination and problem-solving in human communities.

Cooperation is essentially based on communication but strongly dependent on complementarity of needs and functions. This complementarity is essential to ensure an adequate **balance and equilibrium** of microbial communities. Diversity, dynamic regulation of activities, efficient resource use, and close interactions are key drivers that maintain a strong microbial community. Rather than remaining static, these communities maintain equilibrium through continuous feedback mechanisms that prevent any single species from dominating the system. Competition for nutrients, metabolic dependencies, and environmental constraints collectively shape population sizes and activity levels. Host-associated

microbial communities, such as the gut microbiota, further illustrate how balance is sustained through interactions with the host immune system and physiology. Disturbances in these communities, due to environmental stress, antibiotic exposure, or dietary changes, can disrupt equilibrium, leading to shifts in composition and function. Balanced microbial communities are often capable of reorganization, restoring key functions through adaptive interactions.

In both microbial ecosystems and human societies, maintaining balance through diversity, feedback, and mutual adaptation is essential for long-term stability.

No community is free of disruptive actors, and microbial communities are no exception. **Cheaters, exploiters, and pathogens** (microbes capable of causing disease) represent strategies that benefit individual organisms at the expense of collective function. The intention is not to cause harm to the community or the host; it is simply to prioritize one's own interests. Cheaters take advantage of shared resources, such as extracellular enzymes or protective matrices, without contributing to their production, reducing the overall efficiency of cooperation. Exploiters may manipulate communication systems or metabolic interactions to gain disproportionate access to resources. Pathogens, in turn, can disrupt community balance by prioritizing rapid growth or virulence over long-term stability. While these behaviours can undermine cooperation and equilibrium, they are also integral to community dynamics, stimulating regulatory mechanisms that mitigate potential adverse effects. As a reaction, microbial communities activate safeguards, such as spatial structuring, genetic memory, or host-mediated control, to limit exploitation. These evolutionary tensions refine microbial social systems and shape host–microbe interactions.

Just as cheaters, exploiters, and pathogens challenge microbial cohesion, human societies must manage individuals or groups whose self-interest can disrupt collective welfare.

The impairment of cheaters, exploiters, and pathogens, along with the successful functioning of cooperative members, is ultimately determined by the community's **cohesion and resilience**. These qualities emerge from the successful integration of cooperation, communication, balance, and controlled conflict. When these processes function effectively, individual

microorganisms are linked through networks of interaction that promote collective stability rather than fragmentation. Cohesive communities are better able to withstand environmental disturbances, such as nutrient fluctuations, physical stress, or antimicrobial challenges, because functional redundancy and coordinated responses allow the system to absorb shocks. Resilience is further reinforced by the capacity of the community to reorganize after disruption, restoring key functions even if species composition changes. Strength in microbial communities does not depend on uniformity, but on well-regulated diversity and interaction. When cooperative behaviours are maintained, communication remains effective, equilibrium is preserved, and exploitation is constrained, microbial communities emerge as robust, adaptable systems capable of long-term persistence.

The cohesion and resilience of microbial communities reflect how strong, well-connected human societies withstand crises and recover from disruption. Within these systems, diversity provides a buffer against environmental or social shocks, ensuring that both microbial and human communities can adapt and persist.

Both microbial communities and human societies develop forms of 'memory' that guide 'future' responses, whether through functional and genetic adaptation in microbes or institutional 'knowledge' in humans. This shared capacity for learning and adaptation underscores the importance of 'interconnectedness', 'cooperation', and 'resilience' across scales of life.



Neuroscience

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Still taking the first steps

Although *Imhotep*, even in ancient Egypt, considered the brain to have some cognitive functions, this was not always the case in later times. Progress was slow in acquiring knowledge about the functions of this organ, and it doesn't seem difficult to accept that what we now call Neuroscience only gained autonomous status in the second half of the last century. It may seem strange, but we are still taking the first steps.

Reflecting on and studying the brain is to delve into understanding human nature itself and the complex phenomena of life, because humans are the only species that can attempt to explain the secrets of these phenomena through consciousness and the capacity for communication. We must admit that, unfortunately, the human mind does not yet possess the appropriate tools to do so.

Aware of the mission's challenges, the scientific community has enthusiastically engaged in its development. I consider the investment made in the last decade of the 20th century with the program known as the *Decade of the Brain*, first in the United States and then throughout the world, to be a fundamental milestone in this qualitative leap from a scientific point of view. This program brought together participants from diverse fields and gave rise to technology that significantly increased the resources for functional study of the nervous system. It became possible to experimentally study the system's function in volunteers without any type of dysfunction, whereas until then, function was suspected only through the analysis of dysfunction.

The construction of a scientific model capable of supporting this project is an excellent example of a complex system in which variables from various branches of knowledge interact. The response of nervous

system biology to the multiple study techniques that have been developed often creates interpretative difficulties. Electrical signals do not always correlate with chemical changes. It is very difficult to infer causality from correlation results.

The development of multiple ongoing projects around the world has revealed the need to rewrite the methods and content considered specific to each of the classic scientific domains; knowledge increasingly demands transdisciplinarity.

While neuroscience exemplifies the convergence of knowledge, each partner demands results that enrich their own body of knowledge. Projects are born focused on problems and recruit the most appropriate means to obtain answers. The suitability of techniques to the problem under study results in the progressive enrichment of the technique itself.

Interestingly, the influence of cultural archetypes on modern results remains important; rationality prevails over experimental empiricism. The neuron has been chosen as the interpretative key to neural function since the beginning of the 20th century, with the Nobel Prize awarded to Santiago Ramón & Cajal in 1906. Today we must admit its relative importance, with some constraint, as if it were the fall of an empire. We lack an understanding of the complex model, as if we were trying to solve a puzzle of millions of pieces without any guide. We know the micro-processes, but we lack the larger process.

The preliminary results that are emerging inform other disciplines that appropriate the prefix 'neuro' and consider themselves new. This even started with Philosophy, which in the 1980s christened a new chapter as Neurophilosophy, thanks to Patricia Churchland.

Neuroscience is now coveted as a hallmark of quality for initiatives in multiple fields, sometimes demanding more than it can deliver. The relationship with so-called Artificial Intelligence is of particular interest, where dialogue is fundamental. It is quite clear that Artificial Intelligence is integrated into the daily routine of the world, but this does not mean that the goal remains to create copies of humans. The living elements of the earth have learned to interact over millennia, learning from each other the mechanisms of necessary homeostasis; the intervention of a non-living process in this natural dialogue, incapable of recognizing error and learning from it, will inevitably lead to an imbalance.

The Faculty of Medical and Nursing Sciences, together with the Faculty of Medicine of the Universidade Católica Portuguesa, continuing its germinal structure based on the development of interdisciplinarity, has launched a degree in Neuroscience, thus creating its own voice open to the discussion of these important topics, both with partners from other fields of study and with the public.



Nursing

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Operating local transformation with associated territorial development

Nursing, as a science, studies and addresses human responses resulting from phenomena related to health and illness, of individuals, families, and communities.

The Nursing Department at Universidade Católica Portuguesa is an academic community that learns, teaches, researches, and promotes the transfer of knowledge to society, specifically in its areas of activity and responsibility. Based at the university but embedded in other local communities whom it serves and with whom it empowers and equips them for best practices, always with a view to preserving human health and dignity, aligned with the UCP's research mission.

The three cycles of studies in Nursing (Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate) constitute teaching, learning, and assessment communities with a strong emphasis on Practice-Based Learning (PBL). The courses operate between the academic community and the health institutions of the National Health System and Service, as living communities that are simultaneously a learning environment and a focus of complex nursing interventions. Anchored in the learning methodology described above and in Service-Learning (SL),¹ Nursing at Católica articulates the dimensions of Teaching, Research, and University Extension.

Currently, Nursing professors and integrated researchers from the Interdisciplinary Health Research Center lead research projects, namely: *Hope2Care* (study of hope in health), *Spirit in Health* (study of spirituality in health), *ComfortCareflows* (study of comfort in health), *Ethics4Care*

1 Aramburuzabala, P., McIlrath, L., & Opazo, H. (Eds). (2019). Embedding service learning in European higher education: Developing a culture of civic engagement. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315109053>

(study of ethics in health research), *NANDA-I* (study of nursing diagnoses), and *Public Bathhouse Nursing* (study of vulnerable populations in situations of homelessness). The new knowledge produced in these research projects, among others, supports nursing care and assistance within the scope of university extension. As if they were communicating vessels, in turn, university extension, from the academic community to the surrounding communities, also feeds the research that is produced.

These are concrete experiences of teaching, learning, and evaluation communities: university extension projects where students from all three cycles of studies, professors, and researchers, as a community of learners and teachers, promote the translation of knowledge in service to all.

The university extension activity at the Catholic Nursing Center (CEC) has been developed around the mission of University Social Responsibility,² both in promoting citizenship and in the acquisition of transversal skills by students, with the aim of developing actions that affirm UCP as a transformative university at the service of the common good.

As an example, we can list: The *Public Bathhouse Nursing* project (2013), which aims to contribute to the empowerment of users of the Public Bathhouses in the city of Lisbon, mostly homeless people, to better manage their health-disease processes. It includes a nursing consultation, which supports teaching activities (2nd and 3rd cycle students) and CIIS research at UCP); SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 10, 16, 17; The *Empower to Save* project (2013), which aims at health education through the development of skills in Basic Life Support and victim assistance, dimensions that are integral to the exercise of modern citizenship. It covers vulnerable recipients, as a way of differentiating and establishing the identity of the UCP; SDGs 3, 4, 10, 17. The *Empower to Protect* project (2020), which aims at training direct care assistants in Residential Structures for the Elderly, home care assistants and operational assistants, integrating principles of body mechanics into mobilization techniques during their professional activity; SDGs 3, 4, 17; The *Capacitar4Lactente* project (2023), which aims to empower vulnerable families with pregnant women in their 3rd trimester and/or children up to one year old in the Lisbon region, to acquire and develop the parental role, with a view to full citizenship

2 Coelho, M., & Menezes, I. (2021). A Responsabilidade Social Universitária Vista Pelos/As Estudantes: Entre Conceções e Práticas. *Educação, Sociedade & Culturas*, (58), 71–95.

in health; SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 10, 17; The *Eyes at Your Fingertips* project (2023), which aims to promote well-being and health literacy for blind people through interactive exhibitions with anatomical models, where participants have the opportunity to understand the human body and some processes, such as gestation and birth, in a dynamic interaction between students and by touching the respective models; SDGs 4, 10, 17; The *May, Heart Month* project (2015), which aims to develop a culture of prevention of high blood pressure in the academic community of UCP Lisbon; SDGs 3, 4; and the *FarDar* project (2023), which aims to reuse uniforms and work wear used in clinical practice, capable of supporting students with greater financial difficulties in acquiring them free of charge and integrates principles of equality, recycling and reuse under the assumption of sustainability; SDGs 10, 12.

Between learning, researching, and providing nursing care, the idea of community manifests itself in the proximity and constant presence of students, nurses, and professors within the academic community, initially, and later in the surrounding communities that we naturally become part of. We thus triangulate the three major dimensions: teaching, research, and university extension.

In clinical practice, the continuous presence of the nurse in any life context, throughout the life cycle, makes autonomous nursing interventions a concrete response that, in its uniqueness, is resized to the communities, with particular emphasis on the most vulnerable.

Based on a global way of thinking and knowledge – OneHealth – we act in local communities: managing their health-disease processes; developing skills in the area of Basic Life Support; integrating principles of body mechanics; in the acquisition and development of the parental role; in the promotion of health and literacy for blind people; in the prevention of high blood pressure and in the principles of equality, recycling and reuse under the assumption of sustainability.

When the academic community of belonging is linked to the communities we associate with to serve, the community spirit is translated into knowledge, into service, and we operate local transformation with associated territorial development.

Thus, an internal transformation has been carried out at the academic level with the creation of new innovative study cycles in response to the needs of partner communities, as well as in the recomposition and requalification of teachers and researchers. On the other hand, the

increase in research and service to the community has boosted the demand for international professors, researchers and students, whether in technical visits, in hosting scientific events, or in increasing research in relation to strategic peers.

We continue to train and transform communities and Nursing!



Nutrition

Ana Gomes is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Biotechnology

There are ideas that only flourish when they find common ground

The university, when it is recognized as a community of communities, ceases to be just a repository of knowledge to become a neighbourhood of care: in the knowledge that is shared, in the hands that are extended, in the partnerships that develop over time. To envision the University is to think of it as a living entity, which learns from, for and through the people around it, attentive to the needs of the present and committed to creating fairer futures.

At the Escola Superior de Biotecnologia (ESB), Nutrition is a language of belonging and inclusion. Through Nutrition, scientific evidence is transformed into real and everyday choices which are reflected in shared health. This language is built in an ecosystem where teaching, research and outreach are not separate dimensions, but rather complementary ways of caring: for food, for people and for the environments where they live.

To train in Nutrition is to prepare to engage with complexity. From the hospital to the school, from contract catering to community intervention, from industry to research, contexts multiply and require professionals who can interpret different realities, dialoguing with different stakeholders and designing tailored responses. Throughout the Nutrition Sciences degree, attention is placed on the interaction with the community and is formalized in the Community Nutrition course, understood as a bridge between scientific knowledge and everyday life: diagnosing needs, planning and evaluating programmes, working with groups at different stages of the life cycle, while consistently considering the social, cultural and environmental determinants influencing health. Along this journey,

training and education also progresses to postgraduate levels, reinforcing the technical, scientific and human capacity of future professionals and promoting integrated approaches that articulate eating behaviour, health and innovation. Simultaneously, the bridges established with other areas of knowledge – including Psychology (within the postgraduate program in Nutrition, Psychology and Health), as well as with the Católica Porto Business School and the Espregueira Academy, in the area of Nutrition, Endocrinology and Management – reflect the conviction that current challenges require interdisciplinary, collaborative and systemic solutions. Acquiring knowledge in Nutrition is learning to listen, to adapt, to intervene with responsibility and humility. It is not just about applying knowledge; it is about building and co-creating it with others in the community.

Throughout the life cycle, Nutrition also reveals its deepest ethical dimension. Working with older people, for example, presents the university with challenges related to fragility, dependence, and human dignity, serving as a reminder that science is not impartial when it intersects with life. In contexts of proximity, such as those developed with residential facilities and nutritional intervention projects for the elderly (e.g., the NUTRIAGE project), knowledge is no longer just an instrument of evaluation to become an act of care and co-responsibility. In these environments, Nutrition establishes itself as a profoundly human practice, recognizing ageing as an essential component of the community that requires nurturing rather than being viewed as a marginal reality.

However, learning is not limited to the classroom and institutions. The city also becomes a pedagogical space and a living laboratory. Initiatives such as the *Inventing the Food of the Future* (Inventar a Alimentação do Futuro) contest invite young people to think of food as an act of citizenship, challenging them to create solutions that combine health, sustainability and accessibility. By preparing meals with nutritional balance, seasonality, cost, and ecological footprint in mind, they learn that the future is built on concrete choices – and that nutrition can serve as a tool for social transformation. Other initiatives such as the *Nutribrinca* project use accessible, participatory and creative experimentation to empower primary school children not only in terms of food education but also in the development of a more conscious relationship with food and science itself.

This same spirit encompasses opportunities for community engagement, including workshops, debates and hands-on experiences aimed at

maximising food utilisation and minimising waste. In these environments, literacies are fine-tuned, academic and grassroots knowledge are compared and integrated, autonomy and critical thinking are fostered, and the idea that food health is a shared benefit, built together, is reinforced.

Nutrition Research, in turn, assumes a pivotal role of interface with society and the real economy. Through laboratories and structures that engage with industry and consumers, Nutrition translates into applied solutions: reformulating foods to enhance safety and have a more balanced nutritional profile; developing biologically active functional foods; creating more sustainable packaging; preserving nutritional quality, or implementing more responsible technological processes. These actions imply a broad understanding of Nutrition, integrating human health, environmental sustainability and social responsibility. Nutrition science protects and serves, generates shared value and strengthens public trust in the knowledge produced by the university. In this context, internationalisation emerges as a natural extension of the community. Scientific networks, collaborative projects and the diversity of teachers and students create pluralistic learning environments, where different perspectives enrich the way of thinking about food, nutrition, health and innovation.

Consequently, Nutrition has evolved from being just a discipline to becoming a place of encounter: connecting the plate with the planet, the person with the city, and evidence with experience. In a university that identifies itself as a community of communities, Nutrition is a bridge – between science and care, between knowledge and action, and between individuals and collectives. By co-creating with schools, local authorities and companies; by providing access to data and results for scrutiny and by listening to families and health professionals, we strengthen the community bonds that support healthier choices.

At ESB, we learn daily that each person's health is connected to the health of the plate, the land, and the public square where we meet. Hence, the importance of doing Nutrition science that sits at the table, enters the classroom, visits the market, engages with industry and ultimately returns to each household. A science for all, because it is born with, for, and through the community: Nutrition is rigour that cares, proximity that educates and partnerships that multiply.



Open Science

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John Paul II University Library

An opportunity for joint reflection on communities' structural and emerging topics

Over recent decades, we have progressively witnessed significant transformations in the operating models of higher education institutions. These changes stem from a collective process of reflection on their core mission: to educate individuals capable of responding to labour market needs, not only from a technical perspective, but also endowed with critical thinking skills and high ethical standards, thereby contributing to the creation of sustainable and socially responsible contexts.

Thus, the motivations, forms, and agents involved in the creation and dissemination of scientific knowledge, in the context of intense globalisation and accelerated technological change, have inevitably become more dynamic and responsive to immediate needs. This evolution has imposed more agile, collaborative, and transparent models to address major global challenges, without compromising the rigour of practices that generate reliable knowledge and ideally adhering to interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary paradigms.

Starting from a more utilitarian and circumscribed concept such as Open Access, higher education institutions, particularly those whose core mission lies in research and innovation, have progressively developed additional lines of action aimed at Citizen Science, the promotion of Responsible Research and Innovation, the dissemination of Open Educational Resources, and, more recently, the management and availability of Research Data. The concept of Open Science arises as an aggregating framework for a broad ecosystem designed to benefit researchers, institutions, and, to a significant extent, society.

In the academic context, Open Science emerges as a catalyst for transparency and integrity in the creation and sharing of scientific knowledge, democratizing and universalizing access to relevant content that had previously been almost exclusively dependent on rigid commercial models defined by actors external to academia, constraining the scope of action of researchers and funding bodies alike. It is therefore understandable that this new paradigm encompasses a range of new practices, including the definition of institutional and national policies, the negotiation of transformative agreements to encourage publication and access under more favourable conditions, the implementation of new publishing models such as *Diamond Open Access*, and even a conceptual rethinking of research evaluation structures, incorporating metrics and practices that were previously undervalued.

In recent years, Universidade Católica Portuguesa has aligned its strategy with the major goals of Open Science, aiming to integrate key concepts and practices within its community. In this regard, at least three highly relevant strands can be identified. First, the implementation and restructuring of platforms for managing and disseminating scientific information, namely the Institutional Repository (*Veritati*), the Scientific Journals Portal, and the CRIS (Current Research Information System), *Ciência-UCP*, with particular emphasis on increasing interoperability between these systems and other internal and external platforms, streamlining information flows, and enhancing the impact of the data made available. The second component focuses on raising awareness within the entire academic community. This involves discussing key Open Science topics from both theoretical and practical perspectives and providing evidence of their benefits in relation to the recommendations and policies set by leading institutions and funding agencies. Third, the cross-cutting support provided by the science management team, characterized by a high degree of customization and personalization, directed towards the Rectorate's support services, Research Units, and researchers themselves.

The consolidation of Open Science practices and support structures developed at UCP occurs within the context of a significant organizational transformation, aiming for stronger functional and identity alignment between the headquarters and the different regional centres. This process has had a clear impact on research and innovation activities, as well as on the services that contribute to or manage this information, enabling

internal and external stakeholders to carry out their activities in pursuit of the common good, a shared mission, and the core motivations and values that define the institution as a community.

Within this emerging paradigm, research and the construction of robust Open Science foundations are developed in, between, and for communities, through the establishment of reliable strategic partnerships that must nonetheless consider a broad range of criteria. Among these, the impact of the current geopolitical context deserves particular attention, as do, increasingly, issues related to cybersecurity and the abusive sharing and use of information resources. These concerns are further heightened by global competition in the development of artificial intelligence mechanisms and tools that are trained on data available through scientific dissemination platforms.

The formation of extended communities arising from alliances such as *Transform4Europe* (T4EU), and from the relationships established between this alliance and other collective or individual entities close to its partners, enables the creation of global collaborative environments grounded in shared values and high levels of trust. In this context, Open Science emerges as a common denominator, a desired and encouraged practice for creating contextualized and relevant knowledge for the respective communities. In the specific national context, where well-defined support structures exist in terms of technology, interoperability infrastructures, and the standardization of Open Science policies and practices, in which UCP actively participates across multiple communities, the involvement in the alliance has consolidated much of the progress achieved in recent years.

To this end, UCP's participation in *T4EU*, particularly in the context of Open Science, has represented an opportunity for joint reflection on both structural and emerging topics, with a view to producing content and support services for an extended community. This engagement has helped introduce a culture of open knowledge creation and sharing among early-career researchers, including doctoral students. Despite being an international institutional alliance, the transversal nature of the theme has fostered closer relationships and the establishment of bridges between different university stakeholders, generating synergies and value-added services for the entire academic community in the promotion and practice of Open Science.



Partnerships

Rita Bacelar is Director of the Global Engagement Office

Large and small communities coexisting to strive

Universidade Católica Portuguesa is a higher institution community in Portugal with a clear purpose expressed in its mission statement: to train individuals, to cultivate science, to renew the country and the world, and to lead by example.

Within this big community, hundreds of big and small communities coexist aiming to see it thrive. From students sharing a classroom to faculty preparing classes, from researchers discussing a problem to administrative staff working to provide all with better services, from chaplains celebrating Mass to cafeteria employees preparing meals or cleaning staff making sure we all arrive in the morning to a clean and safe office or classroom.

Católica's multiple communities share a common interest which ultimately makes it a modern university, hardworking, full of life, ambitious, focused on the search for knowledge and innovation, while promoting catholic values and aiming to the development of Portuguese society through the education of citizens who will be responsible members of the communities they will belong to during their lives.

The Global Engagement Office (GEO) is one of many communities at Católica. It works daily to facilitate collaborations between our communities and those of hundreds of universities around the world. By strengthening partnerships and supporting individual and group projects reach a global level, the GEO encourages Católica's community advance in its international strategy, reaching out to meet other communities that share the same objectives.

On the other hand, it is this Office's pledge to welcome communities of students, faculty, researchers and visitors from other universities to our *campi*, encouraging the creation of a tolerant and multicultural environment where education and respect are valued while we all, as a community, labour in the pursuit of knowledge and social development.



Philosophy

Bruno Nobre sj is Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences

Philosophy – community

In the history of philosophy, we find abundant resources for reflecting on the theme of community.¹ Community may be approached from a metaphysical and anthropological perspective, insofar as it can be understood as constitutive of the human being itself. The human person exists with and for others. Community may also be examined from the standpoint of social and political philosophy. From this perspective, it is recognized not only as the arena of social and political life but also as an ideal to be attained. In ethics, too, the category of community assumes great importance: the normative dimension of human existence does not occur in a vacuum. On the contrary, it inevitably refers to concrete communities and their respective traditions.

Perhaps because we are increasingly aware of the importance of community for human beings – along with its fragility and the new factors that threaten its erosion – the question of community occupies a prominent place in contemporary philosophy, in thinkers such as Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michel Henry, Martin Buber, Jean-Luc Nancy, Maurice Blanchot, Giorgio Agamben, Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel, Jürgen Habermas, among many others. For several of these and other authors, community is often presented as a kind of antidote to the excesses of contemporary individualism and to a somewhat disordered preoccupation with personal autonomy. It is simultaneously the grounding and the goal of authentic human existence.

¹ For a historical approach to philosophical reflection on community, see: Roberto Esposito, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, trans. Timothy C. Campbell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

Reflecting on the question of community is undoubtedly an important philosophical task. We may ask, however, whether philosophy – especially insofar as it remains faithful to its original vocation – might itself be generative of community.² Today, philosophy is largely understood as an academic discipline of a predominantly speculative character. Philosophers reflect on the world and on human experience using diverse approaches and methodologies. Philosophy is practiced primarily within universities, according to the norms and conventions of academic life. In a certain sense, we might say that philosophy now inhabits an ecosystem different from the one in which it was born.

In its beginnings in Ancient Greece, philosophy was primarily a way of life. There was certainly room for the speculative exercises characteristic of philosophy as we know it today. Yet philosophy was far more than a speculative activity. Philosophical reflection took place within the context of a community and was accompanied by a set of spiritual and ascetic practices.³

In the present context – marked by intense social tensions and by technological developments that lead us to question the very nature of human existence – philosophical reflection acquires renewed relevance. Philosophy is called to reflect critically, deeply, and creatively on reality and on human experience in its various dimensions. It is, par excellence, a mode of critical thinking that questions the foundations and presuppositions of what we do and who we are.

The emergence of artificial intelligence renews the significance of philosophical activity. Machines are now capable of performing, with speed and precision, many tasks that until recently were exclusive to human beings. AI compiles and organizes information, produces and revises texts, solves problems, and simulates artistic creation. In this new and challenging context, the exercise of genuine creativity and critical spirit can only be achieved by human beings. Machines do not replace human beings; rather, they demand that we become truly human by exercising our most authentic capacities. In this sense, in the face of the rise of AI, philosophy becomes a universal necessity.

² See, for example: Noa Lahav Ayalon, «Philosophical community from a historical perspective», *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, 110 (April 2025): 40–45.

³ See: Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

Precisely because it is one of the highest products of human genius, philosophy should be devoted to helping humanity become more fully human. To do so, it must value and cultivate the communal dimension of human existence. It is not merely a matter of reflecting on community, though that remains a task of the utmost importance for philosophy. It is a matter of cultivating the communal dimension of our existence as human beings. Perhaps this is utopian, but I believe philosophy would be more faithful to its vocation if it were practiced within living communities where our humanity is nurtured through the exercise of intelligence, creativity, and spiritual depth.

During the modern period, knowledge became increasingly specialized and fragmented. The various disciplines acquired growing autonomy and often struggle to engage in genuine dialogue with one another. Yet the most pressing and significant problems facing humanity cannot be resolved without the contribution of multiple disciplines. In this context, philosophy may work as a bridge among different forms of knowledge. In other words, philosophy may be called to function as a true hinge of knowledge, building bridges and articulating an overarching vision of humanity's fundamental challenges. In some sense, when questioned about their foundations and presuppositions, all disciplines ultimately converge upon philosophical ground. Philosophy can therefore contribute to the cohesion of the scientific community by ensuring that different disciplines remain in dialogue, without losing sight of the major challenges and questions of our shared humanity.

We inhabit a polarized and divided world. Conversations, even among friends, easily assume a tense or even aggressive tone, as if there were no common humanity that we all share. Here, too, philosophy has an important mission. The attitudes proper to the philosopher create the conditions for genuine encounter and authentic dialogue: analysing questions with depth and rigour; identifying and exposing prejudices and biases; humbly recognizing that the world can be interpreted in many different ways; maintaining openness to the truth and a sincere search for the good.

In conversations blocked by certainties, it may be salutary to reaffirm, sincerely, "I know that I know nothing." In the face of black-and-white portrayals of reality, we might acknowledge, as good philosophers do, that our world and our humanity are multi-coloured, proposing nuanced interpretations of events and circumstances. To simplistic answers

to complex problems, we might oppose the wisdom of the history of thought, which has already tested many of the solutions we believe to be new. Philosophy can reflect on community, but it can also help create the conditions under which healthy political and human communities may flourish in contemporary societies – communities in which diversity is not experienced as a threat.

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Politics

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Restlessness and Rupture: The crisis of community in a turbulent world

In recent years political order has been under the pressure of new trends and events threatening the established rules and principles that defined liberal Democracies and implicitly the concept of community based on freedom, pluralism, participation, inclusion, as well as individual rights and human dignity. On one hand, this pressure comes from within, referring to mechanisms foreseen to assure the proper functioning of internal political procedures such as fair representation, efficient decision making and policy shaping, granting a clear sphere of legitimacy and trust. On the other, it comes from new social needs local authorities must respond to and, furthermore, from external factors such as new technology, new environmental challenges, new forms of communication and even new shapes of conflict. These transformations have led to blurred borders, novel waves of migration and even changes in the perception of national or group identity. The contemporary world has sometimes been identified as “liquid modernity” (Bauman, 2000), but instead of more fluent movements in politics we have been witnessing stronger turbulence, winds of change in the traditional political landscape enhancing unrest, polarization and even rupture.

These drifts are challenging the idea of politics and, to some extent, the *polis*, the public sphere that has been connected since ancient times to the idea of the city as a forum for debate, rights, duties and civic participation. But the changes also affect the idea of “community” itself, a concept that must be reshaped and adjusted to a (brave) new interconnected and interdependent or global world. The crisis of politics is also a crisis of communities. This suggests that we live in a time of

re-evaluation of the meaning of community, not as simple local or public life, but as a complex realm of 'belonging.'

Communities have been distinguished precisely because of this cultural dimension strongly connected to common stories, language and memories, rather than exclusively to a set of principles of legal or political autonomy. To go a step further, communities have even been characterized by communitarian philosophers such as Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor or Michael Walzer as fundamental places of socialization and humanization, as the individual is seen as a "situated self" defined by its community and history (Sandel 1986) that provides a sort of "moral horizon" without which human identity would not be possible (Taylor 1989). In this conception, traditional community life was threatened both by the centrifugal forces of globalization and by the gradual isolation of the self in digital platforms, thus disconnecting people from concrete local awareness, from social bonds and responsibilities. Apparently, the same liberalism that fostered autonomy and self-awareness had led eventually to an excess of individualism, alienating individuals from the community and, by doing so, from their human essence.

Today these problems have become stronger regarding a more interdependent world, as well as the many inventions in the field of digitalization and AI. Accordingly, we could be tempted to ask if there is such a thing as a "global community" or a "virtual community" (considering avatars or IA generated players) if we insist on a necessary connection to a concrete experience of locality or to reality within a specific core of shared values. Taking on the former communitarian criticism to liberalism, Patrick Deenen has for example argued in a more recent essay that the liberal "self" (defined by absolute individual autonomy) has actually led to a breakdown of community and a sense of powerlessness. Therefore, he advocates for a return to local, '*polis*-like' communities where people are bound by shared culture and traditions rather than just legal contracts.

The presumption that there are only plural communities with diverse features and meanings, according to different local and cultural realities – but that it would not be possible to present a single and larger concept of community – has however many risks: in extreme, it allows to accept illiberal models of communities (as for example in China or Afghanistan), eliminating a free and robust civil society and giving up universal claims for human rights. Another misleading assumption is to expect that nationalism could or should make up for the shortcomings of

liberal politics (Yoram Hazony, 2018) by imposing top-down standards for community life (as recently in India) or offering simple solutions based on exclusion and boosted by polarization. However, these hidden agenda of authoritarian tools do not strengthen communities, on the contrary, they bring conflicts and violence absorbing all political life in one absolute national purpose.

Different solutions have been debated in order to overcome the scenario of a breakdown of community, but in our view some of the most interesting focus on the idea of an “inclusive communitarianism” (Tam 2019) defending that the community is not just a source of identity, but a necessary platform for “cooperative inquiry” understood as enhanced democratic participation and decision making, specifically aimed at tackling the feeling of uncertainty, disempowerment and exclusion. This also points to a middle way between liberalism and communitarianism in the sense of the imperative to preserve basic individual rights, while rebuilding a sort of 19th century ‘setup’ of community life such as associations, neighbourhoods, schools, town meetings, etc., based on a renewed consciousness of shared responsibility. In this framework, it would be conceivable to preserve distinct traditions and stories of unique identities without giving away the idea of common principles and values. In a world of unrest this more conciliating approach to the revitalization of communities will not be a walk in the park. But once endeavoured, it will probably lead to a more sustainable political landscape.

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Psychology

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Empowering communities through psychology education

The *T4EU Week 2026*, under the theme “*Community. Communities*”, invites us to reflect on how universities can empower communities through knowledge, collaboration, and socially engaged education. This short paper explores the role of universities as promoters of social transformation, highlights the specific contribution of psychology, and illustrates these ideas through the work of the Faculty of Education and Psychology of Universidade Católica Portuguesa, as well as through my own academic journey in the field of Psychology of Justice and Deviant Behavior.

More than places where knowledge is produced, universities have the responsibility to be drivers of social transformation. In a world marked by inequality, uncertainty, and rapid change, higher education institutions must extend their impact beyond the academia. Knowledge only becomes meaningful when it is connected to peoples lived experiences and contributes directly to the wellbeing of communities. For this reason, universities should work closely with private and public organizations, services and community groups. These partnerships allow academic knowledge to «leave the campus» and become a resource that supports real needs and helps build more capable and resilient communities. By bridging the gap between scientific knowledge and societal needs, universities reaffirm their responsibility not only to educate, but also to contribute to collective wellbeing.

As a discipline dedicated to understanding thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, psychology plays a crucial role in building resilient and inclusive communities. The way we teach psychology has a real impact on how professionals will later contribute to society working directly with people in diverse contexts. Psychology departments must therefore guarantee

scientific rigor and ethical responsibility, ensuring that students learn to base their work on solid evidence while also understanding the human and cultural contexts in which people live. At the same time, training must promote skills such as empathy, attentive listening, and the capacity to support others with care and respect. When these elements come together, psychology becomes not just an academic field, but a practical tool that helps strengthen communities, reduce inequalities, and promote wellbeing for all.

At the Faculty of Education and Psychology of Universidade Católica Portuguesa, this vision is central to our mission. We aim to train professionals who are technically and scientifically competent but also deeply committed to human dignity, social justice, and community wellbeing. Our approach integrates theory with practical experiences such as service learning, internships, and developing applied research from the beginning of the academic path. These experiences allow students to engage early with real-world problems and understand psychology as a tool for social change, becoming future professionals that approach human complexity with respect and responsibility. We believe the relationship established with communities is the key to success and must be grounded in reciprocity: communities teach us as much as we contribute to them, reminding us that our academic mission only makes sense if humanized.

My professional journey as teacher and researcher in the field of psychology, and as dean, has been shaped by a longstanding commitment to justice, human rights, and community engagement. My research has focused on sensitive topics such as gender inequalities, migration trajectories and experiences in the justice system. Working closely with professionals and with detained migrants and imprisoned men and women taught me that my work is, above all, about human processes, and shaped my understanding of psychology as a discipline that must respond to social challenges. These experiences also inspired my leadership in fostering a Faculty of Education and Psychology where knowledge serves humanity and contributes meaningfully to social transformation.

T4EU Week 2026 is an opportunity to reaffirm higher education as the most important driver of wellbeing, inclusion, and resilience within communities. Through shared knowledge and collective action, universities can empower the communities and help shape a better future.



Service-Learning

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Beyond the Classroom: The Transformative Role of Service-Learning in the Community

Working at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa, and specifically at the Faculty of Education and Psychology, has allowed me to experience deeply meaningful moments within the theme “Community. Communities”, particularly through the promotion and implementation of service-learning across UCP's campuses (Ribeiro *et al.*, 2025).

Service-learning enables students, faculty, and partner institutions to connect with the real needs of the communities in which they are embedded and to bring together knowledge, competencies, and energy to design projects that respond to those needs (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009). These projects are implemented and evaluated based on collaboration, horizontality, reciprocity, sharing, and engagement, with the intention of mobilizing all stakeholders – without forgetting those who find themselves in more vulnerable situations (Tapia, 2021). Students are challenged to step outside their classrooms and outside their comfort zones, to walk through the streets of their communities, to listen to real people, to hear their stories, to look into the faces of people whose backgrounds differ from their own, to communicate with them, and to connect with their experiences. Students are invited to feel, to connect with their own emotions, to develop empathy toward other human beings – real, not imagined. They are invited to challenge their beliefs, sometimes deeply rooted, questioning assumptions they may have taken for granted throughout their lives. They are invited to act – when previously their response might have been passivity, indifference, or the belief that there is little one can do. As I once heard in a conference I had the privilege of attending, engaging in service-learning means being MAD! Making a difference!

We are therefore speaking not only of a process of learning, but also of unlearning. Unlearning indifference, discouragement, bystanding, disconnection, dissociation, and the emotional ‘escapes’ that keep us from feeling. And also unlearning paternalism, the tendency to see from a place perceived as superior, the arrogance of believing we know what is best for others, the judgment that distances us so much from love. (Re) learning the value of presence – of ‘sitting’ with another person, opening mind and heart, and allowing something to be built together. Learning by doing... feeling... acting... collaborating... listening... expressing... building... applying what was studied... and bringing new questions back to the classroom, grounded in lived experience...

If I had to choose a single word to describe what service-learning means to me, I would say: CONNECTION. Connection with myself, getting to know myself, discovering myself, in all my different parts. Connection with the other – with their reality, sometimes entirely new to me. Connection with this shared sense of humanity and belonging to a community. Connection with meaning, with purpose, with an internal alignment that ties together the different parts of who I am and the different times of my life (Ribeiro *et al.*, 2023). Connection with being alive in this world, at this moment, with the experience of being human alongside other human beings. Connection with curricular content relevant to the field I chose – content that acquires a completely different meaning when I see its application in practice. Connection with questioning, with reflection, with what is, what no longer is, and what might become. Connection with other students, with faculty members, with professionals and volunteers from partner institutions, with people in the community we meet while mapping needs and designing projects that are meaningful, timely, and appropriate to the moment and context of those involved.

Being a University in a true community means recognizing that we operate in diverse, intertwined, mutually dependent communities. It means accepting that what unites us is far greater than what separates or distances us. It means embracing the humility of exchange, of sharing, of giving and receiving. It means looking not only at problems, needs, and difficulties, but also at resources, opportunities, and potentialities.

Service-learning (SL) inspires us to remain fully awake and to mobilize head, heart, and hands.

Like the element Earth, SL invites us to root learning in the lived realities of communities, to recognize their histories, needs, and resources, and to bring forward proposals that embody support, stability, and presence. Earth reminds us of the importance of touching the ground of people's daily lives and caring for what sustains collective life, with respect for the roots of each place.

The element Water reminds us of the importance of movement, of cultivating fluid, reciprocal, empathic, and trusting relationships within a context of interdependence. Water inspires us to overcome obstacles, to listen and mediate challenging situations with openness, to adjust rhythms, and to build bridges, channels, and social and affective networks that can make a difference in people's lives.

The element Air reminds us of the importance of vision, critical thinking, the circulation of ideas, narratives, and knowledges, shared learning, and lightness. Air invites us to lift our gaze, to question and reflect, to open space for imagination, to take a deep breath, and to welcome different perspectives.

The element Fire reminds us that transformation requires mobilizing energy to let go of what no longer serves, to confront, to deal with tensions and challenges. It calls us to act from a place of courage, capable of illuminating paths that can drive change. Fire reminds us that action is not empty of meaning, but expresses a profound commitment to justice, to the possibility of doing differently, and to the co-construction of new realities.

Thus, our University is itself a living and vibrant community – rooted in the territories, permeated by relationships, moved by ideas, and nourished by the energy of transformation. It does not exist on the margins of the communities that surround it, nor is it limited to observing and understanding the world. Rather, it participates actively in building a more humane world, aligned with the values of its own identity as an institution. It reinvents itself every day in this joint work with diverse communities, through which our students, too, can reinvent themselves – learning to exist in community with commitment, attentive listening, responsibility, courage, and care. A process that seeks to create space for each human being to become ever more themselves, expressing their unique voice and connecting with their purest essence.

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Social Work

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Community as Relation: Social Work and the University as a Living Community

To speak of community is never merely to define a concept. It is to question how we relate to one another, how we inhabit places, how we care for people and territories, and how we imagine a shared future. In Social Work, this question is foundational. It has accompanied the discipline since its origins, not as an abstract concern, but as an ethical and practical challenge that emerges in every encounter, every territory and every lived experience that calls upon us to respond.

From this perspective, community is not understood as a neutral backdrop for action, nor as a homogeneous or stable entity. It is a relational process: a living fabric of bonds, tensions, solidarities and conflicts, continuously shaped by social, economic, cultural and political dynamics. Community is the place where life happens, unevenly, dynamically and often unpredictably. This understanding lies at the heart of Social Work's identity as an academic field and a profession committed to social justice and transformation, not as an abstract ideal but as a concrete orientation for action and knowledge production (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014).

Community as a relational process

Social Work does not view community as a technical object of intervention, nor as a space where predefined responses are applied. Rather, it recognises community as a space of meaning-making, agency and possibility. Community is constituted through relationships, between people, groups, institutions, public policies and environments, and these relationships are never neutral. They reflect power asymmetries,

exclusions and inequalities, but also resources, capacities and collective potential.

It is important to emphasise that communities are always plural. Within the same territory, multiple communities coexist, shaped by distinct histories, identities, vulnerabilities and aspirations. These communities may cooperate, coexist in tension or remain largely invisible to one another. The theme “Community. Communities.” captures precisely this plurality and complexity, widely discussed in contemporary community development literature (Westoby & Shevellar, 2018).

From a Social Work perspective, working with communities requires recognising not only what is visible, but also what is absent, silenced or marginalised. It involves listening to those who rarely participate in decision-making processes, despite often holding deep knowledge of the problems they face, and the resources needed to address them. Community thus becomes not only a space of belonging, but also a potential space for emancipation and change.

Producing knowledge with communities

This relational understanding of community profoundly shapes how Social Work is taught, learned and researched within the University. If community is not a static object, then knowledge about, or rather, with, communities cannot be produced at a distance.

In Social Work education, learning takes place at the intersection of theory, practice and lived experience. Community-based placements, applied research projects and sustained partnerships with social organisations are not peripheral components of the curriculum; they are central sites of knowledge production. Students learn when they develop participatory diagnoses, map local resources that no academic manual could anticipate, confront the limits of institutional responses, and recognise people and communities as legitimate epistemic interlocutors. Within this framework, communities cease to be mere recipients and become co-producers of knowledge. This is not rhetorical but reflects a significant epistemological shift that challenges the University to rethink its position of authority. It does not entail abandoning scientific rigour but situating it. Knowledge gains depth and relevance when it engages with the complexity of social life and integrates local, professional and experiential forms of knowledge, reinforcing the ethical commitment of social science to transformation (Boodram & Thomas, 2022).

The University as a living community

The University is not external to these processes. It is itself a community, or more precisely, a constellation of communities: academic, professional, territorial, civic and transnational. The University exists in, with, through and for the communities that surround it.

From a Social Work standpoint, the University's social responsibility goes beyond knowledge transfer. When the University engages meaningfully with communities, it does not merely disseminate knowledge; it also learns. It learns from situated knowledges, lived experiences and questions that are unlikely to emerge solely within the academy.

This relational model of the University aligns with the mission of *Transform4Europe* and its commitment to educating knowledge entrepreneurs: individuals capable of mobilising different forms of knowledge to address complex social challenges. Social Work contributes to this vision by educating professionals who can build bridges between systems, translate knowledge across contexts and facilitate collective processes without imposing external solutions.

Transformation in times of interconnected crises

Today, community-based Social Work cannot ignore the interdependence between social, environmental and digital transformation. Social injustice, environmental degradation and digital exclusion are not separate phenomena; they intersect and reinforce one another in the lived experience of communities.

Populations in situations of greater vulnerability are often those most exposed to environmental risks, least protected by digital systems and most affected by structural inequalities. A relational and community-based approach enables Social Work and the University to respond in integrated ways, strengthening collective capacities, promoting participation and supporting transformative processes rooted in local contexts (Dominelli, 2012).

Community as a verb

Community, then, is not a static noun. It is a verb, a continuous practice of relating, caring, negotiating and collectively constructing social life. In Social Work, this practice takes shape in everyday acts of listening, presence, accompaniment, organisation and advocacy. It is through these relational acts that knowledge, service and transformation converge.

By adopting “Community. Communities.” as the theme of the *Transform4Europe* Week 2026, the University affirms its aspiration to be a living community, open, dialogical and engaged with the realities that surround it. From the perspective of Social Work, this commitment is not an addition to the University’s mission; it is an expression of its deepest meaning.

Teaching, researching and intervening are, ultimately, ways of caring for the shared construction of common life, recognising that community is not inherited but built, and that this construction requires presence, commitment and shared responsibility.

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Students

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Student life: service, responsibility, and hope as dimensions of knowledge

Community at Universidade Católica Portuguesa is not introduced to students as an abstract principle. It is encountered gradually, through everyday proximity and shared effort. It emerges in classrooms, hallways, welcome weeks, libraries, laboratories, student associations and volunteering projects. Over time, these spaces connect. What students come to recognise is not a single, unified identity, but a community of communities: overlapping, diverse, and sustained less by formal structures than by active involvement.

Across its campuses in Lisbon, Porto, Braga, and Viseu, Católica brings together students from a wide range of academic, cultural, and social backgrounds. Nursing students volunteer regularly with *Comunidade Vida e Paz*, while medical students participate in initiatives such as *VIDA* and *Missão País*, which have become reference points for student-led service in Portugal. Communication students engage at *HeForShe UCP* promoting gender equality, Law students prepare for moot court competitions, and Psychology students develop mental health podcasts that circulate beyond the university. Business and Economics students contribute to Católica Consulting projects supporting social enterprises; Arts students collaborate with *Refood*, a national food redistribution movement; Dentistry students sit on Pedagogical Councils, taking part in decisions that shape their own academic programmes. These activities are not exclusive to neither of these courses, they are peripheral. For many students, they are among the clearest expressions of what it means to belong to the university.

This sense of belonging is reinforced by a dense ecosystem of

student-led structures. Debating societies train students in British Parliamentary and Model United Nations formats, fostering habits of argumentation, listening, and negotiation that extend beyond competition settings. The student associations produce podcasts, magazines, and large-scale events with corporate partners, offering early exposure to professional environments. Film clubs operate across campuses, creating shared cultural reference points, while the *tunas* (Portuguese traditional academic musical groups wearing black capes) maintain a visible continuity between historical academic life and contemporary student identity. Sports teams compete nationally through FADU championships, and quieter initiatives such as book clubs and language tandems create spaces for sustained, informal exchange. Together, these communities form an environment in which education is understood as something practiced collectively, rather than accumulated individually.

At the Medical School, this dynamic is particularly visible. As a young faculty developed in partnership with Grupo Luz Saúde and Maastricht University in 2021, it does not rely on long-established traditions. Students experience this not as a lack, but as an invitation. There is a shared awareness that institutional culture and community must be built deliberately. This has translated into strong student initiatives, including the creation of an active student association, academic societies, sports clubs, diversity club, academic tuna and catholic students club.

The communities formed during these years extend well beyond graduation. *Alumni* return as mentors, lecturers, supervisors, or employers, reinforcing a sense of continuity that students recognise early on. Collaboration is therefore not merely pragmatic; it is relational, shaped by the understanding that academic and professional paths will intersect again. Studying at Católica is often experienced as entering a long-term network rather than a temporary institutional affiliation.

Community at Católica is not idealised. It includes pressure, uncertainty, and failure. Late nights in libraries, demanding oral examinations, and the first encounters with professional responsibility are common experiences across faculties. What distinguishes the student environment is not the absence of difficulty, but the realization that challenges are navigated together. Study groups form organically, peer mentoring develops informally, and support is offered as part of everyday student life rather than as an exception. Difficulty, in this sense, becomes formative rather than isolating.

Students are also acutely aware of the broader social context in which they study. Católica's refugee scholarship programme, recognised by UNHCR as a global good practice, is not perceived as a distant institutional policy, but as a visible presence in classrooms and student organisations. Students who arrive through these pathways participate fully in academic and social life, shaping daily interactions and reinforcing a shared understanding that access to education carries ethical weight. This contributes to a widespread student perception that studying at Católica involves responsibility toward society, not only personal advancement.

For many students, ethical formation is inseparable from academic training. While the university's Catholic identity is never imposed, it informs an environment in which questions of dignity, care, and responsibility are taken seriously. This is particularly tangible in health-related degrees, where students are consistently reminded that technical competence without human awareness is insufficient. When Pope Francis visited the university, his call for students to become "entrepreneurs of dreams rather than managers of fears" resonated because it articulated values already present in student life: service, responsibility, and hope as dimensions of knowledge.

From a student perspective, studying at Universidade Católica Portuguesa therefore means learning how to cohabit shared spaces, how to assume responsibility before being fully qualified, and how to contribute to communities that extend beyond one's own discipline. What shall remain after graduation is not only academic knowledge, but the experience of having learned within and helped sustain a community that is yours for life.

To future students who may one day read this: choosing Universidade Católica Portuguesa is not simply a matter of selecting a degree programme. It is an entry into a network of relationships that will challenge you, support you, and quietly shape who you become. You will encounter communities already in motion, and you will be invited to create new ones in turn. Bring curiosity, bring doubt, and bring a willingness to learn from others. There is space here for growth and friendship, for responsibility and service. And long after classes have ended, many students come to realise that what endured was not only what they studied, but who they studied with – and how, together, they learned to build something meaningful.

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Sustainability

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Sustainability as a Mission, Not as a Trend!

In an era marked by environmental urgency, social inequality, and rapid technological change, the call for sustainability has never been stronger. It is no longer a concept that belongs to fleeting global agendas or periodic campaigns – it is a moral, scientific, and social imperative. “*Sustainability as a mission, not as a trend!*” encapsulates Universidade Católica Portuguesa’s conviction that a sustainable future must be consciously built through education, research, and civic engagement. This conviction permeates the institution’s identity, echoing both the vision of *Laudato si’* (Pope Francis, 2015) and the transversal approach of the *UCP Agenda for Sustainability* (2021) and the *UCP Strategic Development Plan* (2021–2025). At UCP, sustainability is not a choice – it is a vocation, deeply rooted in its mission to serve the common good.

Sustainability as a Core of the University’s Mission

Founded on Christian Humanism, UCP sees sustainability as integral development, placing the human person at the centre of concern while recognizing the interconnectedness of all life. Sustainability, in this sense, is not limited to ecological preservation; it includes social justice, economic ethics, cultural vitality, and spiritual responsibility. The UCP Agenda for Sustainability articulates this integration clearly, envisioning a university that nurtures “sustainable knowledge and action” across teaching, research, and community life.

UCP’s identity as a Catholic university gives this commitment distinct meaning. Inspired by *Laudato si’*; sustainability is understood as “care for our common home.” Pope Francis’s appeal resonates profoundly with the Catholic intellectual tradition: “The climate is a common good, belonging

to all and meant for all.” This insight reinforces the collective dimension of sustainability, calling academic communities to act as stewards and co-creators of a just and healthy planet. At UCP, this call translates into practical action and academic responsibility, embedding sustainability into its mission of shaping ethical, knowledgeable, and compassionate leaders.

Education for Sustainable Citizenship

Universities and colleges can – and should – be models of sustainable practices such as conserving resources, improving energy efficiency, managing waste responsibly, and adopting circular strategies, so that students begin to view these actions as everyday habits. Broadly, higher education institutions can operate on two fronts: by effectively teaching sustainability concepts to students, who then carry these practices into their homes and social circles; and by directly engaging external audiences through scientific, technological, and cultural outreach and by forming partnerships with local communities and industry (Boiocchi *et al.*, 2025).

Education is UCP’s most powerful instrument for change. Integrating sustainability into the curriculum is not a marginal initiative; it is a deliberate pedagogical choice that reflects the belief that knowledge must serve life. UCP has progressively incorporated the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into courses across all faculties, from economics and management to theology, law, arts, and biotechnology.

Through its *SDG* courses and interdisciplinary programmes, students explore sustainability as an ethical and systemic challenge. They learn not only to analyse environmental data or design sustainable technologies, but to understand the moral and human implications of their decisions. Courses are designed to cultivate critical awareness and transformative action, enabling students to become, in the words of the *Transform4Europe* vision, “entrepreneurs of knowledge.”

Moreover, UCP promotes learning beyond classrooms. Through challenge-based learning, service-learning projects, and entrepreneurial initiatives, students engage directly with local communities, businesses, and NGOs. This experiential approach empowers them to translate theoretical knowledge into real-world impact. The result is a generation of citizens who recognize sustainability not as an abstract goal but as a shared responsibility anchored in solidarity and service.

Research for a Sustainable Future

Research stands as the other pillar of UCP's sustainable mission. The university hosts 15 research centres dedicated to addressing societal and environmental challenges.

These centres foster innovative and collaborative research that bridges science, policy, and community practice. From climate action and biodiversity protection to ethical finance and digital sustainability, UCP researchers work in partnership with public institutions, private organizations, and international consortia to co-create solutions.

Initiatives such as the *InSuRe Hub* (Innovation, Sustainability and Regeneration Hub), create an international ecosystem of transdisciplinary knowledge that promotes business solutions with a circular, sustainable and regenerative scope, powered by disruptive technologies. In addition to its commitment to fundamental research, the University is recognised for the social impact of its research agenda and its contribution to policymaking. By aligning academic inquiry with societal needs, UCP reaffirms that universities are not isolated ivory towers, but living institutions embedded in their contexts. Research is not pursued for academic recognition alone; it is guided by the belief that knowledge must serve transformation. As the *UCP Agenda for Sustainability* expresses, the university's aim is "to generate research that contributes to the well-being of people, the protection of ecosystems, and the advancement of justice."

Sustainability Through Community Engagement

UCP's understanding of sustainability is profoundly relational. Grounded in the *Transform4Europe 2026* theme "*Community. Communities*", the university recognizes that true transformation emerges from collaboration and shared purpose. The university's community engagement strategy bridges academic excellence and social responsibility.

One emblematic example is the *Green Campus Initiative*, which reimagines UCP's campuses as laboratories for sustainable living. Through energy-efficiency programmes, waste-reduction measures, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable mobility, the university models the very values it teaches. But beyond environmental performance, these initiatives nurture participation: students, faculty, and staff collectively design actions, evaluate outcomes, and disseminate best practices. Sustainability becomes a lived experience within the university

community and radiates outward to surrounding regions. The social dimension is in fact central to UCP's sustainability approach, expressed through various initiatives in volunteering, inclusion, well-being, culture, the arts, and community service. These actions demonstrate UCP's role as an agent of change, contributing to a fairer, more inclusive society aligned with the SDGs.

In addition, UCP actively works with local communities through service-learning projects and parish partnerships to address social and environmental needs. Our strong commitment to the Service-Learning (ApS) methodology, which is available across all university campuses, combines academic learning with community service, promoting student reflection on lived experiences. This approach has been used to develop projects that address real community needs, enabling students to apply their theoretical knowledge in practical contexts.

Whether improving urban garden ecosystems, supporting social enterprises, or providing legal and economic advice to vulnerable groups, UCP fosters a culture of solidarity and ecological conversion. The community becomes both the beneficiary and the co-author of change.

Through its role in the *Transform4Europe* Alliance, UCP amplifies this local commitment by engaging in transnational partnerships. Together with European universities, UCP advances the three core vectors of *T4EU* transformation: environmental, digital, and societal, thus positioning sustainability as a shared European mission. This collaborative spirit reflects the conviction that universities, as global communities of knowledge, must act together to shape a sustainable and inclusive future.

Faith, Knowledge, and Transformation

In line with *Laudato si'*, UCP's approach recognizes that sustainability entails a profound conversion, a shift in worldview that integrates science, ethics, and spirituality. Education and innovation alone are insufficient without compassion, humbleness, and an understanding of interdependence. The Catholic intellectual tradition offers a moral compass that prevents sustainability from being reduced to management efficiency or branding.

For UCP, sustainability is about coherence between what the university teaches and how it operates, from governance structures and procurement policies to equality initiatives and interfaith dialogue. In all these dimensions, sustainability becomes a mark of integrity, an

authentic witness to the mission of serving the common good through truth and love.

Conclusion: Mission and Hope

At UCP, sustainability is not a passing trend or an academic accessory, it is the living expression of the university's mission. Across teaching, research, and community engagement, UCP embodies the call to care for creation, promote justice, and foster human flourishing.

By aligning its strategies with the wisdom of *Laudato si'* and the goals of the *UCP Agenda for Sustainability*, the university affirms that the future depends on our capacity to act as one global community, united by respect for life and a spirit of fraternity. As we approach the *Transform4Europe Week 2026*, under the theme "*Community. Communities*", UCP stands as a witness to the fact that sustainability is not merely to be discussed, but to be practiced, lived, and shared.

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Technology

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Bringing projects and communities together

As part of the *T4EU* project, and specifically within its technological component, the Universidade Católica Portuguesa needed to implement a series of projects to transform its technological infrastructure and application systems, in order to enable the implementation of all processes across the various work packages.

Initially, it was necessary to integrate UCP's authentication infrastructures with the *European EduGAIN* protocol to enable the University's users to authenticate themselves on external systems that support this protocol, such as the *MetaCampus* platform. In this regard, in addition to deploying the servers supporting the technical integration, it was also necessary to establish a protocol with FCT/FCCN, the entity that manages the *EduGAIN* system in Portugal.

Subsequently, and given that UCP has an automated system for managing its UDI (unique digital identity), it was necessary to develop automated mechanisms to populate the attributes required by the *EduGAIN* protocol for all users accessing the *MetaCampus* platform. Automatic mechanisms were also developed to assign *MetaCampus* profiles (Student, Course Manager and Office Manager) to users based on information recorded in the ERP/UBW systems and in the Academic Management Systems, *Sophia* and *Fénix*.

Finally, the UCP Information Systems helpdesk team has set up a dedicated support process for users of the *MetaCampus* platform, to assist with resolving issues relating to authentication systems. This support is now available nationwide via email (helpdesk@ucp.pt) or telephone (309 100 110).



Theology

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Theology: a Communal Enterprise

Google Scholar, a major academic platform, operates under the motto “Stand on the shoulders of giants.” It is a compelling call for scholars to participate in a collective effort to expand common knowledge. It is striking, however, to note that such a thought-provoking sentence was first articulated (by Bernard of Chartres) many centuries ago, during the Middle Ages. Furthermore, this invitation, now extended to researchers from all scientific fields, originally stems from a very peculiar academic discipline: theology (and philosophy). Theologians, in fact, are particularly aware of the communal nature of all intellectual activity. This is partly because they recognize themselves as heirs to a rich heritage of religious wisdom, and partly because they place themselves before that reality “greater than which none can be conceived” (Anselm of Canterbury): the divine. Consequently, theologians understand that they always stand on the shoulders of giants – their predecessors – while facing the greatest “giant” humanity can encounter: God. Perhaps theologians can remind us that all other researchers, regardless of their field, are doing the same.

From and for Communities

Theology is inherently a communal enterprise. This conclusion holds true regardless of the analytical lens applied to the field. Theology both emerges from and addresses a community, whether it is defined as “faith seeking understanding” (Anselm of Canterbury) within a particular religious tradition, or as a radical interrogation of the divine impulse within human hearts and cultures. Drawing upon Josiah Royce’s conceptual framework, theology functions as a “community of interpretation”:

a collective bound by shared memories, inquires, and sources, united by a commitment to interpreting human experience against the backdrop of the divine.

Religious communities often emphasize the communal identity of theology. From this perspective, the theologian necessarily operates within a faith-based community – sharing its beliefs to better interpret that faith, to translate it into discourse, and to critically address historical or epochal deviations. The theologian serves here not only as a thinker, but also as a builder of the religious community. Thus, theology is both a communal task and a communal treasure.

In post-secular societies, this communal nature may be less obvious, but it is no less true. The declining public relevance of religious institutions, alongside the individualization of religious itineraries, tends to blur this collective inquiry into the divine. While theologians in this context may appear to work in isolation, this does not reflect the full picture. Post-secularity is characterized by the deinstitutionalization of religion, but not by its extinction – quite the opposite. Religious and theological inquiry has simply migrated to other realms of culture. Secular theology (i.e., theology done beyond religious communities) is still communal, as can be seen in secular spaces, such as universities, the arts, and the media. Even in these secular spaces, theology remains an expression of anxieties and dreams of the broader human community – a larger community, but a community, nonetheless.

Thus, regardless of how one defines it, theology remains a distinct form of reasoning that both emerges from and speaks to a community. In other words, theology is inherently a communal act. Whether it is institutional or public, sacred or secular, religious or spiritual, theology consistently functions as a common good and a communal enterprise.

Through Communication

Communication and community are intrinsically linked. They exist in a state of perpetual circularity, where communities shape languages and languages, in turn, build communities. In this sense, theology is itself a form of language. Communication lies at its very core. Indeed, it is defined as *lógos*, i.e., as word. The primary task of theology is to “give-word” to the religious experience of humanity and, more profoundly, to “give-word” to the revelation of the divine. By constructing this language, theology participates in the same circularity through which communities

are formed and expressed. Thus, it is through communication that theology fulfils its communal task.

It is noteworthy how theology developed its own methodologies by focusing on specific forms of communication. From their earliest stages, for example, Jewish and Christian theologies relied heavily on the art of commentary. This involved receiving and valuing the discourse of another, frequently a religious or spiritual authority from the past, thereby fostering a chain of commentaries and a community of interpreters. Historically, it was not uncommon for these commentaries to become so intertwined with the original text that they could no longer be clearly differentiated. What began as an authorial text evolved into a communal one. Later, in the Middle Ages, the *disputatio* (disputation) method breathed life into the newly established university. At its core, this method generated both vigorous debate and the formation of distinct schools of thought. More recently, dialogue has emerged as a primary theological method suited for a pluralistic and secular age. This approach also seeks community through communication, assuming not only that individuals can unite by sharing and listening to one another's *lógos*, but – more importantly – that they can approach the truth by journeying together through the words they exchange.

By its own nature, theological discourse is open-ended. This is not because the traditions delivered by previous generations have lost their truth or meaning, but for a more fundamental reason: in addressing God and the divine, theology grapples with the ineffable. Thus, theology finds itself in a paradoxical position, tasked with the mission of 'wording' God in human language while knowing that no human word can ever truly encompass God. To some, this might seem a sufficient reason to dismiss the theological enterprise altogether, leading to opposing 'a-theological' stances, such as atheism or fideism. However, this limitation is actually a source of strength. It ensures that theological communication remains an unfinished task; and, consequently, the commentary, the disputation, and the dialogue about God remain open to higher forms of language and, by extension, higher forms of community.

Toward Communion

However, the radical openness of theology is not chaotic. It is rather oriented toward an end. This represents what might be termed an "eschatological tension" inherent in theology. It travels through time

and space, drawn toward a horizon of communal fullness that remains unattainable in time and space, even if this envisioned future transforms the visible present. This definitive end, though impossible to determine rigorously, takes the shape of communion. Theology, therefore, aims at communion as a higher form of community.

While maybe shared by various religious traditions, the concept of communion as the ultimate end is particularly emphasized by Christian theology, where historical communities (such as the Church) serve as anticipations of this definitive state of communion. Communion is a form of deep intimacy in which individuals do not lose their distinct identities. On the contrary, it is a relationship that reconciles identity and alterity, unity and diversity, giving and taking. In this definitive resolution of relationship polarities, they no longer function as zero-sum games but instead mutually reinforce one another. Theology places itself at the service of this superior form of community by highlighting the fundamental questions that make us radically one, bridging diverse forms of human inquiring about what transcends all there is, and deepening human acquaintance with the One who is, in himself, according to Christian theology, communion and love: God.

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Translation

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translation and/as community

“Translation is as old as nature and nurture. [...] Translation seen as conversation – for conversation assumes equality among the speakers – is clearly the language of languages, the language that all languages should speak.” (wa Thiong’o, 2007: 136)

Arguing that translation and community are closely related concepts is easy and challenging in equal measure. Easy for those who pay attention to the world around them, without the pressure of the age-old nostalgia for origin(al)ity – in an eschewed sense, this nostalgia is the mother of all current (and probably fatal) obsessions with innovation and singularity. Challenging, because most of us have fallen prey to both the myth of creation as radical originality and the fixation with newness.

What I am proposing here is that we take a fresh look at the world, not as a collection of singularities, but rather as a creative cross-pollination of stories that incessantly translate who we are at a given point in time and how we perceive the world around us – as such, any idea of community would be built on a manifold translatedness of encounters in language and experience.

From the onset, translation as a hermeneutic activity is – in the narrowest as well as the broadest and more metaphorical senses – a way to make sense of the world, of others and, as Friedrich Schleiermacher already anticipated in 1813, of ourselves. As such, translation premises all communication and produces community. We need only think about the manifold tasks that involve translation: speaking (what I mean is...), communicating (let me make myself clear to you...), making sense of different artistic forms (what does this mean?), psychotherapy (what

do my experiences, my feelings, my dreams say of me), teaching, writing (a journal, a book, a newspaper article), producing and interpreting the Law, among many others. The languages of community presuppose numerous acts of translation, negotiation, and consensus.

To a considerable extent, human beings are capable of living together precisely because they have the faculty to translate themselves and others into ways that produce commonality through language and experience. Thus, arguably, every human experience results from and in acts of translatedness that are ultimately rooted in a shared sense of a common destiny. Seen in this light, translation is a sign of both humanity and humaneness.

in the beginning was (also) translation? translation as love.

In the beginning was the verb. In the Judeo-Christian narrative tradition, the word as a performative act in itself includes translation. According to the King James's version, after creating "the heaven and the earth (...), God said, Let there be light: and there was light. || And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day and the darkness he called Night." (Genesis, 1: 3-5). And just as God created the firmament, gathered the waters, created the stars, animals, and human beings and, so the narrative goes, "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Genesis, 1: 31). I would suggest that this narrative invites us to witness how God created the world by translating His word into the material world.

While the idea may sound unorthodox and/or perhaps too preposterous, the question remains: what would change if we were to look at the Judeo-Christian God as a master translator, as He engages in multiple acts of translation throughout the biblical narratives? Not only does He create the world via the word, but He also translates Himself into various forms across time – the ultimate example being His translation into human form in the person of Christ. A God who lovingly translates Himself into human language(s) and understanding – what bigger proof of a boundless love and mercy?

In this sense, and to go back to wa Thiong'o's claim, translation is indeed the language of languages, in terms of language both as a (divine) way of 'worldmaking' and as a system of representation that symbolically entails consecutive acts of loving translation. Similarly to God's original

translation, human beings translate themselves into communities of affection and togetherness.

The argument I am putting forward results from an impulse to symbolically read the world *otherwise*. What if we disposed of notions of “singularity”, “originality” and “creation ex-nihilo”, and instead reimagined the world as a web – a set of relations; a horizontal, never-ending exchange of perceptions, stories, knowledge forms; what Ngugi wa Thiong’o calls, affectionately, a “globalectic world”, i.e., a network without an actual centre (2023: 54) or an ever-changing one? What would be gained if we changed lenses, and accepted looking around us, and at us, not from the perspective and expectation of originality and innovation, but from the assumption that creativity results from accretion and translation, i.e., from the assemblage of plural views stemming from similar and yet different arrays of experience. After all, “[m]eaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved; perhaps it is because our sense of what is the case is constructed from such inadequate materials that we defend it so fiercely, even to the death” (Rushdie, 1997: 12).

As a meaning-making activity, nothing human is foreign to translation. A human being, one might argue, is a converging locus of an ongoing series of translational trajectories, gestures, and experiences – the result of everything and everyone s/he has met: “Everything is collage, even genetics. There is the hidden presence of others in us, even those we have known briefly. We contain them for the rest of our lives, at every border that we cross” (Ondaatje, 2007: 17). So much for pure, radical originality, then.

Furthermore, translation can also be seen as a method of sorts, a way of apprehending and relating to the other, since it commands full attention to the other – a kind of unconditional hospitality, not perhaps in the Derridean sense, but to the extent that one is committed to listening to the other. In our present-day world, this is no small feat. Aware that we are translated and translating beings, we may perhaps be more inclined to welcome others into the fold as equals, as we anticipate the possibility of some kind of prismatic recognition of ourselves in them – after all, we can only discern ourselves in the face of the Other/others, to heterodoxically echo Levinas.

The promises of self-help books notwithstanding, human beings are far from monolithic or singular. They are arguably inhabited by an

incessant translatedness: “We die containing a richness of lovers and tribes, tastes we have swallowed, bodies we have plunged into and swum up as if rivers of wisdom, characters we have climbed into as if trees, fears we have hidden in as if caves. (...) We are communal histories, communal books” (Ondaatje, 1992: 261). Almásy, the protagonist of *The English Patient* (1992), translates humanity into an assemblage of encounters, a geography of commonality – crisscrossing translations of people met, ideas and experiences shared, of community-building. This results in a uniqueness of sorts, but one that draws on polyphony, metamorphosis, and translation rather than a radical originality that builds on an impossible obsession with origins.

As Paul Éluard phrased it in 1963, “Nous vivons dans l’oubli de nos métamorphoses” (We live in the oblivion of our metamorphoses). However, we would do well to *remember* (in the dual sense of recollecting and reassembling) our metamorphoses, as they signal the incompleteness that points both to the vulnerability and the beauty of being human. To conclude, without translation, and the willingness to translate ourselves, others, and the world, there is no community.

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Transparency

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Transparency and Community

Transparency, in its original and literal sense, refers to a physical property of matter that allows light to pass through it, thereby revealing what lies inside or beyond a given material. In a figurative and conceptual sense, this property has long supported broader meanings associated with clarity, intelligibility and the absence of ambiguity. The growing social and political relevance of this notion – understood in opposition to opacity, misinterpretation and inaccessibility – helps explain its widespread adoption as a metaphor in political discourse, organisational practice and community life since the late twentieth century.

The term **community** derives from the Latin *communitas*, itself formed by *cum* (with, “together”) and *munus* (responsibility, “shared obligation”, “service”). This etymological root reveals the conceptual foundations of the term: a group of individuals bound by what they share and by the responsibilities that emerge from that shared condition, sustained by a sense of belonging and mutual interdependence. In this light, community should be understood not merely as an agglomeration of individuals, but as a moral and operational framework, within which relationships are shaped by shared values, collective purposes and reciprocal responsibilities. In contemporary contexts, one such essential value – and increasingly non-negotiable – is transparency.

Today, transparency has become a central pillar of the healthy functioning of any community. It is recognised as a foundational value of democratic societies, modern organisational systems and collective arrangements that aspire to foster trust, accountability and collective well-being. Within an environment marked by increasing social complexity, intensified information flows and heightened public expectations,

transparency can no longer be considered a decorative norm or an optional ethical gesture. Rather, it constitutes a substantive element of governance and community life, with demonstrable implications for decision-making quality, relational solidity and institutional legitimacy.

The notion of transparency evokes the possibility of perceiving phenomena clearly, without distortion or concealment. Within a community setting, this clarity becomes manifest in the ways information is disseminated, processes are explained, criteria are articulated, and responsibilities are acknowledged. Transparency does not simply entail the availability of data; it requires intentionality, ethical orientation and a commitment to communicational practices that are accessible, meaningful and comprehensible. It is this relational and human dimension – far exceeding any purely technical definition – that endows transparency with its transformative potential.

Transparency functions as a generator of trust, an enabler of accountability, a promoter of participation and a reinforcement of integrity.

Trust, as widely recognised in organisational and social theory, constitutes a critical resource for any community – whether territorial, academic, professional or institutional. Trust cannot be decreed; it must be cultivated, and transparency is its principal enabling condition. When individuals understand the rationale behind decisions, are aware of the criteria employed and can identify the responsibilities and limitations of each actor involved, trust is far more likely to emerge. Conversely, opacity tends to produce uncertainty, interpretative noise, fragmented perceptions and, at times, suspicion. A lack of transparency creates fertile ground for alternative narratives that weaken social bonds and hinder cooperation.

By contrast, a community that embraces transparent practices fosters an environment marked by proximity, respect and intellectual honesty. Individuals perceive themselves as competent and legitimate participants, capable of understanding and evaluating information relevant to their collective life. Shared information becomes a mechanism of inclusion rather than an instrument of authority. Under such conditions of trust, communities become more resilient, more prepared to face complexity and more inclined toward collaborative engagement.

Transparency also plays a decisive role in strengthening accountability. Accountability becomes feasible only when clarity exists regarding processes, norms, objectives and outcomes. Transparency opens the evaluative space required for such scrutiny and contributes to more just, equitable and effective systems. In public contexts, it allows citizens to examine policies, monitor expenditure and understand the implications of decisions. In organisational settings, it reduces arbitrariness, clarifies performance expectations and supports fairer internal processes. In educational communities, transparency upholds both academic and institutional integrity, thereby fostering trust among students, faculty and leadership. Importantly, accountability should not be equated with punishment; rather, it concerns the visibility, comprehensibility and contestability of actions. By rendering actions visible, transparency nurtures a culture of shared responsibility and strengthens collective commitment to the common good.

In similar fashion, transparency is essential to meaningful participation. Participation is frequently taken as an indicator of democratic and organisational vitality, yet no participation can be substantive without adequate information. Individuals require timely, accurate and relevant data to engage through critique, suggestion, deliberation or vote. Transparency thus democratises access to knowledge, transforming community members into co-producers of solutions and enhancing the legitimacy of collective decisions. When decision-making processes are transparent, they cease to be perceived as external impositions and are instead understood as outcomes of shared deliberation – even when consensus is not achieved. Furthermore, transparency broadens the discursive space, encourages critical reflection and allows diverse perspectives to emerge, thereby improving the quality and robustness of outcomes. Participation cannot be manufactured by decree; it must be cultivated, and transparency forms its principal condition.

Transparency does not replace integrity, but it renders integrity publicly perceptible. Communities that adopt transparent practices reduce spaces susceptible to conflicts of interest, diminish the likelihood of arbitrary decisions and strengthen ethical consistency. Communities are not abstract constructions; they are composed of individuals acting on the basis of values, perceptions and experiences. Transparency is therefore not merely a procedural requirement: it is a cultural attribute whose presence or absence profoundly shapes relational dynamics and

institutional life. A culture grounded in transparency supports continuous learning, collaboration, diversity inclusion – by reducing informational asymmetries – as well as innovation and ethical coherence. Opacity, by contrast, tends to generate defensive, risk-averse and less collaborative environments. Institutional secrecy seldom protects; more often, it weakens.

Finally, the significance of transparency for community life lies in its contribution to the common good. A transparent community is more informed, more cohesive and more participatory. It is also better equipped to prevent conflicts, anticipate challenges and adapt to change. Transparency emerges, therefore, as an expression of ethical responsibility: it reflects a commitment to truth, respect for individuals and confidence in the community's own capacities. In a context characterised by increasing complexity, accelerated information flows and heightened societal expectations, transparency must be understood not simply as a value but **as an ethical infrastructure sustaining the quality of relationships, organisational functions and collective life.**



Volunteering

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What Does Volunteering Reveal About the University as a Community?

Universities are, by nature, communal spaces. They are living communities that welcome students eager for knowledge; academics and researchers who share their expertise and deepen their understanding of the world; and staff members who, together with them, contribute to the everyday life and shared mission of the university. Beyond this internal community, universities operate within concrete territories, in dialogue with the societies that surround them. Yet to what extent does this dialogue translate into a genuine understanding of the people, vulnerabilities and challenges of the communities around them? It is within this horizon that volunteering takes shape as an expression of service and as a relational space of transformation.

The word volunteering derives from the Latin *voluntas* and refers to the idea of free will. To volunteer is to place oneself freely at the service of the community, in a spirit of commitment and relationship. Shaped through encounter, it implies responsibility, reciprocity and sustained engagement. In this relationship, where giving and receiving are intertwined, volunteering reveals its transformative potential, both at a personal and at a communal level.

In this context, the role of universities, within their educational mission, becomes particularly significant in ensuring that volunteering is understood and lived as an integral part of institutional life and community identity. When volunteering ceases to be merely complementary and becomes an institutional priority, universities not only transform their internal communities, but also place themselves freely, and without expectation of return, at the service of the wider community, building

relationships over time. In contexts of sustained university–community engagement, volunteering functions as a lived practice through which knowledge, service and responsibility are brought into dialogue.

Volunteering has its roots in long-standing practices of mutual aid and communal cooperation. From the nineteenth century onwards, when organised volunteering gained clearer expression in Europe, voluntary action has continued to evolve and expand its reach.

Today, according to the most recent report published by the United Nations, approximately 2.1 billion working-age people engage in volunteering every month, representing around 34.5% of the global adult population. Yet a significant part of this contribution remains invisible, particularly in its informal and community-based forms, raising questions about how volunteering is recognised, valued and understood. In this global context, the recognition of 2026 as the *International Year of Volunteering* reinforces the timeliness of this debate and invites higher education institutions to reflect on the academic recognition of volunteering, as highlighted in the *Call to Action for the Future of Volunteering*.

While the scale of volunteers is striking, numbers alone do not tell the whole story. Volunteering is about relationships, emotions and lived experience. International studies point to students' concern for educational spaces where experiences such as volunteering are recognised as meaningful to their education. In this regard, the *Youth Talks* survey, involving over 50,000 young people worldwide, shows that young people's aspirations are profoundly humane, with peace, respect, solidarity, kindness and care for others emerging as central concerns, alongside a strong need for listening, empathy and emotional protection. The volunteer is someone who freely places themselves at the service of others. Through contact with people, contexts and concrete forms of vulnerability, volunteering challenges abstract readings of reality and invites a form of learning grounded in encounter. As Pope Francis observes, the invitation is "to be present to those in need of help, regardless of whether or not they belong to our social group (...) I should no longer say that I have neighbours to help, but that I must myself be a neighbour to others—" In the university context, such engagement invites students, academics and staff to step outside familiar frameworks and to assume a responsible commitment shaped by listening, humility and openness to transformation.

If such learning is truly transformative, one might speak, with Portuguese poet Alexandre O'Neill, of a certain "compulsiveness" in volunteering, not as external obligation, but as an inner adherence to a way of living that is freely chosen. In a free rendering of his poem V.C., O'Neill writes (author's translation):

*Under a regime of Compulsory Volunteering,
life becomes easier to live:
you end up having to do,
not what you do not want,
but what you truly want to do.
(...)
Under a regime of Compulsory Volunteering,
this is how I live —
because I choose to.*

In a world marked by increasing complexity and fragmentation, education cannot be reduced to technical training or the acquisition of specialised knowledge alone. The OECD *Learning Compass 2030* emphasises the need for educational systems to prepare students not only to reflect, but also to participate actively and responsibly in collective life. In his work *The Idea of a University* (1852), Cardinal John Henry Newman argued that the mission of the university goes far beyond professional preparation or the transmission of specialised knowledge. He proposed an integral form of education, oriented towards the development of critical thinking, discernment and a sense of responsibility towards society. Volunteering may be understood as a current expression of this vision, offering a space where knowledge enters into dialogue with reality. Yet to what extent do universities today create the conditions for this dialogue to take place in a consistent and sustained manner?

Volunteering also invites universities to reflect on the relationship between ideas and lived reality. Knowledge that develops at a distance from concrete contexts risks remaining abstract or insufficient to respond to complex social challenges. By fostering sustained encounters with people, needs and vulnerabilities, volunteering reminds academic institutions that learning is not shaped by reflection alone, but also by proximity, attention and experience. In this sense, volunteering becomes a space where reality questions ideas and deepens educational responsibility.

Contemporary social challenges exceed the capacity of individual responses and call for communal networks grounded in cooperation and shared responsibility. In this context, volunteering may emerge as a privileged space of encounter and reciprocity. The question that remains is this: what place do universities choose to give to volunteering in how they understand themselves, organise institutional life, and relate to the communities around them?

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