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Community–University Partnership in Service-Learning: Voicing the Community Side

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Abstract

Service-learning (SL) activities provide multifarious benefits for students, faculty members, and community members. Although the literature includes considerable research on students' and faculty members' outcomes, it also reports a lack of attention to benefits for community members. This study sought to address this gap, giving voice to community partners of a SL module in Community Psychology. We collected 12 interviews, complemented by a brief questionnaire exploring community partners' understanding of SL, their perception of the mutual gain and reciprocity aspects, their motivations, and their challenges. Results show that open attitudes toward collaboration from faculty members strengthen the partnership; community partners consider the opportunity to be coeducators of students as a motivation for their SL involvement; from the perspective of reciprocity, they also particularly appreciate its generative dimension. Giving voice to community partners offers new and useful insights that can contribute to improving SL community–university partnerships.

Keywords: service-learning, community-university partnership, reciprocity, community organizations

During the last decade, public engagement has been pursued by many institutions. Public engagement can be described as a set of actions intended to promote universities' commitment toward communities through participatory research, teaching, and service activities, which represent ways to implement the third mission of the university (Boffo & Moscati, 2015). The third mission underpins a focus on knowledge exchange and transfer (Cesaroni & Piccaluga, 2016; Rosli & Rossi, 2016) and seeks to generate public value (Bozeman et al., 2015) and societal impact (Fini et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2016). An Italian study on scholars' public engagement (Anzivino et al., 2018) identified two main clusters of public engagement actions: general political engagement (e.g., policy-making activities, publishing scientific articles) and local community engagement (e.g., school activities, public lectures, community activities). In this article, we focus on the latter kind of engagement.

Community engagement can be defined as "a collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" (Driscoll, 2008, p.39). The resource exchange is intended to achieve a common benefit, such as improving curriculum, teaching, and learning; preparing educated, engaged citizens; strengthening democratic values and civic responsibility; addressing critical societal issues; and contributing to the public good (Carnegie Foundation, 2020).

According to Thompson (2000), no true community-engaged action succeeds without institutionalization. Higher education institutions need to formally commit to communities, seeking to make community-oriented actions widespread, legitimized, expected, supported, permanent, resilient,

and part of their routine (Kramer, 2000). The introduction of service-learning (SL) into university courses represents one of the actions for community engagement institutionalization (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Martin et al., 2005; Thompson, 2000).

Service-Learning

Service-learning can be defined as

> an innovative pedagogical approach that integrates meaningful community service or engagement into the curriculum and offers students academic credits for the learning that derives from active engagement within community and work on a real-world problem. Reflection and experiential learning strategies underpin the process and the service is linked to the academic discipline. (Aramburuzabala et al., 2019, p. 33)

SL is designed to meet not only the teaching and learning objectives of the university but also the needs identified by the community (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). In order to promote mutual benefits and be successful, SL needs to tackle four aspects, defined as the four Rs of SL (Butin, 2003):

1. Respect: Students and faculty need to respect the community and its values and recognize other (nonacademic) kinds of knowledge (d'Arlach et al., 2009);
2. Relevance: Activities need to be relevant both for students and communities, and so need to tackle community needs while expanding students' understanding of the world in which they live (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991);
3. Reflexivity: University and community partners should critically reflect on the quality and the diverse components of their relationship. Moreover, reflexivity should always accompany students' journey with fieldwork within SL activities (Jacoby, 2015);
4. Reciprocity: It is one of the foundations of community engagement and consists of recognizing, respecting, and valuing the knowledge, perspective, and resources that each partner brings to the collaboration. In this regard, Dostilio et al. (2012) categorized reciprocity according to three orientations: (a) exchange: the interchange of benefits, resources, or actions; (b) influence: a relational connection that is informed by personal, social, and environmental contexts; and (c) generativity: may involve a transformation of individual ways of knowing and being or of the systems of which the relationship is a part. The collaboration may extend beyond the initial focus as outcomes, ways of knowing, and systems of belonging evolve (pp. 19–20).

Effects of SL on students, faculty members, and community members are multifarious. On students, positive effects of SL concern the acquisition of transferable competencies in both traditional and online experiences (e.g., communication skills, teamwork, critical thinking, and sense of civic responsibility) and academic benefits, such as academic achievements and positive attitudes toward school and learning (Asghar & Rowe, 2017; Bowie & Cassim, 2016; Celio et al., 2011; Compare & Albanesi, 2022; Fullerton et al., 2015; Salam et al., 2017; Salam et al., 2019).

Research on benefits of SL for faculty members suggests that it represents an opportunity to improve research and teaching activities (Able et al., 2014; Darby & Newman, 2014; Farooq, 2018; Phillips et al., 2013) and to promote a sense of self-efficacy among instructors, enhancing teaching ability and instructional productivity while raising awareness about community needs (Kinloch et al., 2015; Stewart, 2012). Furthermore, SL promotes approaches to teaching that enable faculty members to critically think about the applicability of academic theories to real-life problems through the hands-on experiences of their students (Carrington et al., 2015).

According to research, benefits for communities involved in SL projects are various: free consultations (e.g., career, nutrition, business, educational), training, guidance, increased awareness of communities' needs, growth in social and economic capital (e.g., fundraising activities), and many others (Coleman & Danks, 2015; Jarrell et al., 2014; Marshall et al., 2015; Simola, 2009; Weiler et al., 2013).

Community–University Partnership

A community–university partnership (CUP) is "an explicit written or verbal agreement between a community setting . . . and an

academic unit to engage in a common project or common goal, which is mutually beneficial for an extended period" (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2005, p. 85). CUP is a broad concept that can include community-based research projects, service-learning activities, university–community educational agencies' shared programs, and even community-based training programs (Russell & Flynn, 2001). These collaborations involve different kinds of engagement, operational actions, scopes of activities, and levels of commitments (Strier, 2014).

CUPs are essential to service-learning (Long & Campbell, 2012). Leiderman et al. (2002) emphasized the central role of community partners' perspectives in developing successful CUPs. Furthermore, voicing the thoughts and reflections of community partners allows faculty members to comprehend community partners' motivations and insights about the partnership (Sandy & Holland, 2006), as well as gaining insight into the outcomes of engagement and the community partners' evaluation of them (Hart & Northmore, 2011; Weerts & Sandmann, 2008).

Nevertheless, establishing CUPs may encounter resistance at both the academic and community level. From the perspective of faculty members, a lack of respect for community knowledge, a view of community members as objects of research rather than partners, and an inadequate understanding of the collaboration may occur (Ahmed et al., 2004). For community partners, a lack of communication, negative prior experience, lack of precedent, and the difficulty of abandoning old paradigms can hinder the collaboration (Goldring & Sims, 2005).

Overcoming these barriers is fundamental to enabling the development of positive partnerships. The effectiveness of CUPs is influenced by several elements since it requires the collaboration of people from different sectors to reach a common goal.

Although CUPs do not require equal representation of all stakeholders in all aspects to be acceptable (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002), members should promote and pursue equitability and fairness to prevent distress and misperceptions that may result when one side receives greater (or lesser) benefits. Some elements can sustain a CUP's effectiveness, such as (a) meeting the partnership's set goals, (b) constancy of communication, (c) recognizing the value of the partnership, (d) working toward maintaining partnerships, (e) understanding how community partners perceive the costs and benefits of entering into a community–university partnership, and (f) addressing equity and equality in the partnership and their effect on community partners' perceptions (Leiderman et al., 2002; Worrall, 2007).

When we consider the outcomes related to SL experiences within CUPs, we find that community partners perceive students' activities (e.g., providing mentoring activities, direct services, and spending time with community members) as useful to support organizations to advance their mission while having a direct impact on community members. Moreover, the name recognition of the university brings a positive light to the work of the community-based organizations. Finally, community partners see themselves as coeducators with the university (Budhai, 2013).

Although perspectives of universities on SL teaching, scholarship, and students' learning are well-documented (e.g., Asghar & Rowe, 2017; Bowie & Cassim, 2016; Farooq, 2018; Stewart, 2012), less attention has been devoted to community partners' perspectives (Basinger & Bartholomew, 2006; Bushouse, 2005; Dorado & Giles, 2004; Tryon et al., 2008). There is a general lack of studies that examine the motivations, intentions, and outcomes of SL from the community side (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Matthews, 2019; Schmidt & Robby, 2002; Tryon & Stoecker, 2009), particularly in countries like Italy that do not have a strong tradition of scholarship in SL. The present study seeks to address these gaps and broaden the understanding of CUPs' functioning in the Italian context from the community's perspective.

The Context: Service-Learning at the University of Bologna

The history of SL in Italy is extremely recent. The academic reflection on this methodology at the University of Bologna started in 2015, with the Erasmus+ project Europe Engage. Given the commitment of scholars and the supportive effect of the Europe Engage project, in late 2016 the Department of Psychology started its first pilot experience, developing a SL module for 30 Clinical Psychology master's students. Since that time, SL has continued to grow. To support the SL modules, the university

established community–university partnerships with a number of local social services. The scope of the partnerships grew from one local partner and six SL projects (for one academic module) to 23 local partners and 24 SL projects (for three academic modules) in 5 years.

SL is currently implemented in two master's degree programs within community psychology labs and several baccalaureate degree programs within a transferrable competence course. The academic community psychology's scholars identified SL as a suitable approach to achieve the educational goals of the discipline. Community psychology emphasizes social justice as a core value of the discipline, active participation in promoting social change, and adopting an ecological systemic approach (Evans et al., 2014). It gives special attention to analyzing the role of contextual and systemic factors (including power-related ones) on individuals' trajectories.

Data for this study derive from two SL academic modules that were implemented in the academic year 2019–2020. The modules were offered to 15 School and Community Psychology master's students (a compulsory community lab), and 35 Clinical Psychology master's students (an elective community lab). Both labs offered students 4 ECTS credits and were composed of 10 classroom hours and a minimum of 20 fieldwork hours. Students were divided into 15 projects, designed and coordinated by 12 tutors (or site supervisors). The terms "tutor" and "community partner" are used interchangeably, for in this experience the community partners are also coordinators and practitioners of the local social services.

Activities started in October 2019 and ended in January 2020 with a closing interactive event in which participants presented the results of the SL activities to the community. Given that many community partners worked with young people in (formal and nonformal) education settings, the final interactive event mainly targeted, in addition to practitioners and other community members, high school students, who could benefit from the activities and the solutions university students developed during their SL. The tutors and faculty members met twice before the module (July and September), twice during students' field activities, and once upon completion of the module.

Methods

Participants

The participants were 12 community partners who were involved as tutors of 15 service-learning projects from the Department of Psychology during the 2019–2020 academic year. Tutors were members of organizations located in the same community where a branch of the Psychology Department is based and with which the department had long collaborated. The first time that SL was implemented, the community psychology academic staff proposed that the local welfare service organizations be involved in the SL pilot (as part of an Erasmus+ project). Since then, a regular procedure has been put in place. The community psychology lab academic staff contacted the local community organizations asking if they were interested in formalizing their collaboration within the SL approach. Those who expressed interest received training on SL and were asked to participate in a SL design workshop to prepare a project that could simultaneously meet community needs and contribute to the learning outcomes established for community psychology academic courses. Members of the organizations who participated in the training and the SL design workshop were appointed tutors. The majority were women (n = 7, 58%). Age ranged from 28 to 63 years (M_{age} = 43.6; SD = 10.48). The tutors' professional activities were distributed as follows: 46.7% education (i.e., pre–after school activities, school training); 40% social services (i.e., homeless or foreign services); and 13.3% healthcare (i.e., harm reduction or prevention services). Most tutors had previous SL tutor experience (n = 9, 75%). The rest (n = 3, 25%) experienced SL tutorship for the first time.

Instruments and Procedures

To collect data, semistructured interviews and questionnaires were used. Interviews aimed to investigate tutors' understanding of the SL methodology, their level of satisfaction with their role, the overall perception of the mutual gain and reciprocity aspects, and suggestions on further implementation of the SL experience. For the online survey an adapted version of the end-of-program survey (Shinnamon et al., 1999), originally designed for faculty and here customized and implemented for tutors, was used (Appendix A). The survey

measured the following dimensions.

- Being a tutor: motivations. To grasp the motivations underlying their participation in SL projects, tutors were asked to choose the most relevant responses among eight items (e.g., What are the reasons that led you to collaborate with the university to carry out a Service-Learning project? Curiosity; I wanted to try something new; I wanted to contribute to the professional training of future psychologists; etc.). There was also one open-ended item.
- Being a tutor: relationships. To understand the perceived quality of the relationship between tutors, students, and faculty, six items were used, with a 5-point scale of agreement: 1 = *not at all*, 5 = *completely* (e.g., I felt supported as a tutor by the university faculty; I saw myself as a point of reference to the students).
- Being a tutor: difficulties. To investigate the perceived effort in managing some situations and activities, tutors were asked to rate eight items according to their perceived level of difficulty on a 5-point scale: 1 = *very easy*, 5 = *very difficult* (e.g., Facilitate students' reflection; monitor students' activities in the field). Additionally, tutors were asked to choose the most relevant responses among seven items (e.g., What are the most relevant difficulties you encountered? University time constraints, students' training, etc.). There was also one open-ended item.
- SL effects and benefits. To assess the perceived benefits of SL activities for both community partners and community organizations, tutors were asked to choose the most relevant responses among seven items (e.g., Students' involvement in your organization had an impact on the following: Raised our public profile because of university involvement; students brought new energy to the organization; etc.).
- Additionally, tutors were asked to write about the positive and negative effects of the community–university partnership in two open-ended questions.
- Service-learning. General questions on SL were also included. Participants responded to seven items with a 5-point scale of agreement: 1 = *not at all*, 5 = *completely* (e.g., SL positively contributed to students' education; SL should be implemented in other departments). One open-ended item asked for general thoughts on the experience or suggestions, and a closing item asked their interest in continuing their collaboration with the university (yes/no answers).

Interviews were conducted with the community partners between December 2019 and January 2020. Participants were contacted via emails and phone calls and invited to participate in an interview about their experiences in the service-learning projects. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, except for one phone interview, and lasted approximately one hour.

The online survey was administered in January 2020 to all tutors. Tutors were given the link to fill out the survey at the end of the interview, as we wanted to provide tutors with an anonymous instrument to add some final reflections on their general feelings about the activities. One respondent forgot to submit the answers at the end of the survey. Unfortunately, due to the anonymous nature of the survey, it was impossible to trace the missing participant.

Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

Descriptive analyses were conducted on the questionnaires' data: Mean values, frequencies, and SDs were measured for each dimension. Pearson's correlation was also computed. The free-form text segments were converted into quantitative data through a quantitizing process (Sandelowski et al., 2009). Each response was pasted into a blank spreadsheet. Three categories were identified from the responses to the survey questions and assigned to columns of the spreadsheet: positive aspects, negative aspects, and implementation. After we read all the responses, subcategories were recorded and each segment coded, linking each response with categories and subcategories.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded, with the tutors' consent, and then transcribed verbatim to allow for analysis. Qualitative data were encoded for thematic analysis using a template approach, as outlined by Crabtree and Miller (1999). This process required the application of codes to organize the corpus for subsequent in-depth analysis. In this study, the template was generated a priori, following the research questions. Four main themes were outlined for the code manual: SL perceptions, tutorship experience, reciprocity, and further implementation of the experience.

Two coauthors read the transcriptions of the interviews independently, testing the applicability of the predefined codes to the raw text. Although initial comparison of the results showed no need for recoding, different sections of text had, in some cases, been assigned different codes. Therefore, reflective sessions seeking to clarify the in-depth meaning of the raw text were conducted to resolve all discrepancies. The in-depth analysis outlined the existence of two additional themes. The first emergent theme is inherent to the relationship between the faculty and the tutors (i.e., the quality of the relationship and its maintenance). The second one builds on the effect of continuity on the partnership quality (i.e., improvement of activities, gaining experience, deepening SL as a teaching methodology). Upon completing the categorizing of the transcribed interviews, specific themes were outlined.

Results

The results section presents tutors' perspectives using quantitative and then qualitative data, with quotes from the interviews providing a more accurate understanding of participants' experiences. The Discussion section integrates findings and elaborates on them.

Quantitative Results: Descriptive Statistics

Being a Tutor: Motivations

As the frequencies reported in Table 1 show, the main motivations indicated by participants were "positive prior experiences with students" (88.9%) and "want a connection with the university" (80%). Other reasons included "curiosity" (62.5%), the "need for further resources" (66.7%), and "contribute to the training of future psychologists" (60%). A minority also listed "reflection on my work" (44.4%), "try something new" (37.5%), and "encouraged by my colleagues" (37.5%).

Being a Tutor: Relationships

High mean values, reported in Table 2, indicate a positive perception of the relationship between tutors and students, as well as between tutors and faculty.

Being a Tutor: Difficulties

As shown in Table 3, the mean values concerning the level of difficulty perceived by tutors are relatively low. Items (e.g., evaluate students) that involve tutorship activi-

Table 1. Frequencies of Tutors' Motivations

	N	%
Positive prior experiences with students	8	88.9
I wanted a connection with the university	8	80.0
Need for further resources	6	66.7
Curiosity	5	62.5
I wanted to contribute to the training of future psychologists	6	60.0
I was looking for a way to reflect on my work	4	44.4
I wanted to try something new	3	37.5
I have been encouraged by my colleagues	3	37.5

Note. *N* = number of respondents; % = percentage of answers.

Table 2. Mean Values of the Quality of Tutors' Relationships	
Range 1–5 (1 = *not at all*; 5 = *completely*)	M(SD)
I was able to develop a good relationship with the students in the SL course.	4.91 (0.30)
I was able to develop a good relationship with the university staff.	4.91 (0.30)
Because of this experience, I am more interested in developing an extended partnership with the university.	4.82 (0.41)
I felt valued as a tutor by the university.	4.55 (0.52)
I felt supported as a tutor by the university.	4.45 (0.69)
I saw myself as a point of reference to the students.	4.36 (0.51)

Note. M = mean value; SD = standard deviation.

Table 3. Mean Values of the Level of Difficulty Perceived by Tutors	
Range: 1–5 (1 = *very easy*; 5 = *very difficult*)	M(SD)
Share with students confidential information regarding users	2.64 (0.67)
Evaluate students	2.27 (0.65)
Create and structure the activities	2.27 (0.65)
Participate in the presentation of activities/project for students	2.27 (0.65)
Participate in monitoring meetings	2.27 (0.79)
Facilitate students' reflection	2.18 (0.87)
Participate in the closing event of the activities	2.09 (0.83)
Monitor students' activities in the field	2.09 (0.83)

Note. M = mean value; SD = standard deviation.

ties that are common for different kinds of experiences (e.g., internship, volunteerism) have lower SD values. Conversely, items linked to "participatory activities" that are specific to SL experiences (e.g., facilitate students' reflection) have higher SD values.

More than half of the participants (60%) rated students' training and orientation as the most relevant aspect to tackle, whereas 50% of tutors reported the human, physical, and economic resources needed to carry out the SL activities as being a major critical point (Table 4).

SL Effects and Benefits

Participants indicated that the main benefit of the collaboration (Table 5) was the new energy brought by students to the organization (100%), followed by the chance to network with other community agencies (70%). Additionally, more than half of the participants indicated the benefits of raising their public profile because of university involvement (60%) and the increased awareness of working procedures and approaches (54.5%). The ranking of perceived benefits and effects of the CUP suggests that organizations value students' contribution to the creation of new ways of knowing and doing (cf. *influence reciprocity*, Dostilio et al., 2012) and the possibility to create new networking opportunities (cf. *generative reciprocity*, Dostilio et al., 2012).

More than 80% of participants (n = 9) answered the question on the positive effects of the CUP. As frequencies in Table 6 show, more than half of the respondents (55%) identified the exchange of resources (cf. *exchange reciprocity*, Dostilio et al., 2012) as one of the most relevant positive effects of the CUP. Only 36% of participants (n = 4) answered the question regarding the negative effects of CUP. All the respondents (n = 4, 100%) identified time commitment as the most demanding challenge.

Table 4. Frequencies of the Most Relevant Difficulties Experienced by Tutors

	N	%
Training/orienting students	6	60.0
Human, physical, and economic resources needed (used)	5	50.0
Time constraints of the academic world	4	40.0
Time devoted to students' supervision	3	30.0
Supervision of students	1	10.0
Communication with university faculty	0	0.0

Note. N = number of respondents; % = percentage of answers.

Table 5. Frequencies of SL Effects and Benefits Reported by Tutors

	N	%
Students brought new energy to the organization	11	100.0
Facilitated networking with other community agencies	7	70.0
Raised our public profile because of university involvement	6	60.0
Increased awareness of working procedures and approaches	6	54.5
Facilitated our access to academic resources	1	11.1
Saved me and my organization money, thanks to the presence of additional staff	1	10.0
Made me more aware of some of my prejudices	1	10.0

Note. N = number of respondents; % = percentage of answers.

Table 6. Frequencies of the Positive and Negative Effects of the CUP

	N	%
Positive effects of CUP		
Collaboration with students	2	22.0
New points of view	2	22.0
Training of future professionals	1	11.0
Professional enrichment	1	11.0
Networking enrichment	1	11.0
Exchange of resources	5	55.0
Negative effects of CUP		
Time commitment	4	100.0

Note. N = number of respondents; % = percentage of answers.

Service-Learning: The Learning Dimension

High mean values, reported in Table 7, suggest that tutors consider SL useful not only for students but also for community organizations.

Almost half of the participants (45%; *n* = 5) answered the open-ended question on the SL implementation (Table 8). Sixty percent of respondents (*n* = 3) suggested "additional time" (meaning more hours devoted by students to service) as one of the ameliorative actions for CUP implementation. Other suggestions were related to "SL implementation in other departments" (20%), "partnership's formal recognition" (20%), and "maintenance of closing interactive events" (20%).

On the final item (Would you be interested in continuing your collaboration with the university?), all participants answered positively (Yes, *n* = 11, 100%).

Quantitative Results: Correlational Analysis

Correlations, reported in Table 9, suggest that the perceived usefulness of SL for students' education supports the belief that SL should be implemented within more courses (*r* = 0.624) and the intent to develop extended CUPs (*r* = 0.624). Course goals' clarity is highly correlated with "positive prior experiences with students" (*r* = 1.000) and negatively with the idea that SL saved the organization money (*r* = -1.000). The item "positive prior experiences with students" negatively correlates with the belief that SL saved the organization money (*r* = -1.000). The belief that the community benefited from SL activities is positively correlated with the idea that the SL program made the university more aware of the community's needs (*r* = 0.694).

The feeling of being valued as tutors by the university positively correlates with the perception of being a point of reference to the students (*r* = 0.690). The perceived support from the university negatively correlates with the difficulty of supervising and monitoring students' activities (*r* = -0.745; *r* = -0.604). The interest in the development of extended CUPs negatively correlates both with access to academic resources (*r* = -1.000) and the difficulty of participating in monitoring meetings (*r* = -0.772). The motivation "I wanted a connection with the university" positively correlates with the creation of good relationships with the university staff (*r* = 0.667). The item also positively correlates with willingness to contribute to the training of future psychologists (*r* = 0.756) and negatively correlates with the difficulty of devoting time to students' supervision (*r* = -1.000).

Overall, quantitative results depict positive perspectives on the SL experience and suggest that the presence of healthy

Table 7. Mean Values of Tutors' Perception of Service-Learning

	M(SD)
SL should be implemented into more classes and programs at the university.	4.82 (0.41)
The goals of the course were clear to me.	4.82 (0.41)
SL students have been able to accomplish their assignment in my organization.	4.73 (0.47)
SL positively contributed to students' education.	4.64 (0.51)
SL experience helped students to see how the subject matter they learn in the classroom can be applied in everyday life.	4.45 (0.52)
The community served by our organization benefited from the activities of the SL students.	4.45 (0.93)
Participation in the SL program made the university more aware of the needs in the community.	4.09 (0.70)

Note. M = mean value; SD = standard deviation.

Table 8. Frequencies of Suggestions Concerning Service-Learning Implementation

Needs for CUPs implementation	*N*	%
Partnership's formal recognition	1	20.0
Maintenance of closing interactive events	1	20.0
SL implementation in other departments	1	20.0
Additional time	3	60.0

Note. N = number of respondents; % = percentage of answers.

CUPs can act as a multiplier, boosting the networking capacity of involved organizations. Reciprocity is the core gear of the CUP mechanism; it represents major benefits even when respondents are asked to answer open-ended questions (see Table 6). In this regard, correlations suggest that tutors are aware that reciprocity is not equal to economic gain (e.g., course goals' clarity and positive prior experience with students negatively correlate with the belief that SL saved the organization money), but it means something different. Moreover, tutors established positive relationships with students and faculty members as reported in Table 2, and these relationships seem to be a protective factor to cope with the commitment that SL entails, as low rates in Table 3 and the correlations between the perceived support from the university and the difficulty of supervising and monitoring students suggest. Finally, quantitative results also suggest that SL is beneficial for higher education institutions according to community partners' perspectives. SL makes the university more aware of community needs while gaining "coeducators" who can contribute to the training of future practitioners.

Qualitative Results

Service-Learning as an Opportunity

Participants frequently defined SL as an opportunity at different levels.

An opportunity for the organization, in terms of professional enrichment and innovation of practice. SL is perceived as an encounter between different perspectives that enables revitalization and confrontation. Moreover, they appreciated being coeducators of the students by introducing them to the organizations' mission and letting them experience a different role within the community.

> For us, SL is an opportunity to share our work with other people, and to educate them. It is also a great opportunity for me to share and discuss my activities with other people, students represent an outlook on what I am doing, since they give me continuous feedback, either positive or negative. (I_3)

An opportunity for students, in terms of gaining experience through practice in real-world contexts, learning what the field has to offer in terms of resources and occupational opportunities.

> SL is a great opportunity for university students, that can learn about realities in the field, experiencing what they can potentially do in their future job. Training students to tackle the world of work is a university's duty, so this is a very good thing. (I_5)

An opportunity for community members to engage in different roles and establish different relationships.

> We realized that these informal moments [with university students doing SL] enable our kids [the users] to disclose a bit more about themselves. Therefore, for us, they [the informal moments with university students] become a tool to understand our kids' competencies that, usually, in a wider classroom-context, do not emerge. (I_4)

Tutorship Experience

Participants described the SL tutorship as a valuable experience that offered opportunities to learn something new (e.g., updated knowledge and renewed practices). Among experienced participants, positive outcomes

Table 9. Correlation Values

Items	1	3	4	6	7	8	10	11	12	13	14	16
SL positively contributed to students' education.	1											
SL should be implemented into more classes and programs at the university.	**.624***											
The goals of the course were clear to me.	.134	1										
The community served by our organization benefited from the activities of the SL students.	.386	-.289	1									
Participation in the SL program made the university more aware of the needs in the community.	.386	-.289	**.694***									
I felt valued as a tutor by the university.	.069	.043	-.149	1								
I felt supported as a tutor by the university.	-.341	-.033	-.042	**.633***	1							
I was able to develop a good relationship with the university staff.	-.239	-.149	-.194	.346	.219	1						
I saw myself as a point of reference to the students.	.179	-.134	.251	**.690***	.341	.239						
Because of this experience, I am more interested in developing an extended partnership with the university.	**.624***	.389	-.024	.516	-.033	-.149	1					
Positive prior experiences with students.	-.250	**1****	-.205	-.250	-.250	-.125	-.125	1				
I wanted a connection with the university.	.102	-.250	-.271	.102	.102	**.667***	-.250	-.189	1			
I wanted to contribute to the training of future psychologists.	-.089	**-.272**	-.089	.167	.609	.408	-.272	-.250	**.756***	1		
Difficult to supervise students.	.218	.111	-.145	-.408	**-.745***	.111	.111	[a]	[a]	-.408	1	
Difficult to devote time to students' supervision.	-.048	.218	.190	-.356	-.488	-.509	.218	.189	**-1****	**-.802****	.509	
SL saved me and my organization money, thanks to the presence of additional staff.	.218	**-1****	.218	.272	.248	.111	.111	**-1****	.189	.272	-.111	1
Facilitated our access to academic resources.	-.500	.125	-.125	-.395	.287	.125	**-1****	.143	.218	.316	-.125	-.125
Difficult to participate in the monitoring meetings.	-.481	-.143	.087	-.399	-.067	.115	**-.772****	**.693***	.192	.152	-.062	**-.681***
Difficult to monitor students' activities.	.325	.351	-.187	-.356	**-.604***	.036	.054	.555	.371	-.147	**.762***	-.441

Note. *The correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).
**The correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).
[a] Calculation impossible to perform because one of the variables is constant.

were linked to the tutor role. They were pleased with the experience and expressed satisfaction with the tasks accomplished and the quality of communication. Moreover, a sense of group cohesion emerged: The tutor explicitly referred to his/her relationship with the students as a team.

> Everything was good in both projects. Students were very helpful, and we had great communication. This doesn't mean that they liked or understood what I was doing all the time, but I'm at ease with describing us as a team. I have learned something from this experience. (I_3)

In contrast, inexperienced SL tutors struggled to carry out and to coordinate the activities as they had never filled this role before.

> It was tough because it was my first time as an activities coordinator. I mean, it happens to have volunteers to coordinate in my work. However, structuring and thinking of meaningful experiences for and with students was pretty complex, to be honest. (I_5)

The correspondence between students' interests and organizations' goals, their resourcefulness, and their academic preparation made "easy and natural" the welcoming process from the very beginning.

> I think that there has been a connection from the very beginning, a sort of imprinting. Students were very engaged; they had their own interests, and my projects met these interests. (I_3)

All participants expressed their satisfaction with being part of the CUP as tutors, and some as coeducators.

> I'm satisfied since there has been a positive collaboration between the SL student and us operators, the volunteers' group, and the spectators [citizens who took part in the initiatives of the organization]. Especially, I'm happy that the student was able to engage with three levels of interaction. (I_12)

In participants' experience, tutorship can't be a random, informal experience. It needs commitment and specific skills (e.g., time and project management) to be meaningful and useful for both communities and academics. A tutor offers some insights on what is needed from the organization side to work with the projects/students most productively.

> To be a tutor in a SL project, you need various competencies, such as knowing how to manage time, how to design projects and activities. I do not think that in every organizational reality there are spaces or sets of activities that can be uprooted, packaged, and proposed randomly to people. (I_11)

Reciprocity

Participants offered several examples of different orientations regarding the concept of reciprocity (Dostilio et al., 2012). At the exchange level, tutors indicated that SL offers the ability to increase the number of services offered, reaching more users or delivering more specific activities (e.g., qualitative and quantitative research).

> Being honest, some of the activities were possible thanks to SL students. We accepted more clients [for our educative after school program] knowing that they would be here this year. (I_6)

At the influence level, interviewees identified the ability to blend the acquired knowledge and experience that derives from SL activities with the know-how of the organization.

> Last year, SL students defined an observational grid [that I adopted in my work routine] and then gave me detailed feedback on my work. They surveyed teachers and I never did that before. Teachers' answers were very interesting and helped me to reflect on my practices. I keep in mind everything I've learned, even now that I'm once again by myself in the classrooms. But now I have a satchel of new knowledge, that I tested with the SL students, and I can work differently. (I_2)

At the generative level, respondents identified SL with the ability to innovate practices

and shared the perception that SL experience allows the emergence of a new culture that supports the work of community partners and the university.

> This kind of collaboration allows on-site training for university students and to scaffold a virtuous circle between research and practice, that mutually nurtures each side, university and civil society. Together we create culture. (I_3)

Further Implementation of the Experience

Participants proposed several actions to improve future SL experiences. One suggestion was to mix students from different programs to bring different competencies within the activities.

> Next year, I would like to mix Clinical Psychology students and School and Community Psychology students within the same project. I think that it'd help them to integrate different competencies. (I_8)

> I think that involving other departments would represent a further step. It would be interesting to have SL teams composed of psychology students, engineering students, and architecture students to create multidisciplinary groups. (I_8)

Other participants suggested implementing SL experiences in other cities.

> It would be nice to have SL not only in this city but also in other campus branches giving other regions the possibility to benefit from SL activities. (I_7)

Additional time and longer time spans were reported by respondents as one of the major changes needed to guarantee an improvement of SL activities for both communities and students.

> Maybe, there is little time for students to deeply understand the organization and the inner sense of our activities. Being here for a longer time could let them be more confident in our classroom activities, raising their efficacy. (I_2)

Participants that were new to SL suggested providing tutors additional training to better tackle the activities.

> A few hours workshop to improve our competencies of how to manage projects and time, monitor and communicate results, would be useful. I think that if we knew more about how to coordinate these aspects, it'd be a win–win. (I_11)

Faculty

Throughout the in-depth analysis, two additional transversal themes emerged. The first one is inherent to the role of faculty in SL activities. Participants underlined positive interactions with faculty members, who were described as available, reliable, competent, and a point of reference.

> I remember that in my first experience I did not know exactly what SL was, so I trusted the faculty, that collaborated with us several times. I trusted her when she told me that it would have been an added value for my organization, and it was. (I_12)

Effects of Continuity

The second theme to emerge is the effect of continuity. Being engaged in long-term CUPs helps partners improve their activities, gain experience, and deepen the understanding of the SL process.

> Over the years, SL helped us to review our work practices and to improve them. (I_9);

> Over the years, I feel like it is easier for me to tackle the tutorship activities since I experienced many situations. (I_10)

Discussion

This study aimed to broaden the understanding of SL community–university partnerships by giving voice to the community partners' perspective on the SL experience. Community partners were asked about their understanding of the SL process, their motivations, and the challenges they have encountered. Moreover, they were asked to share reflections on the pros and cons of the CUP from their perspective as collaborators on the implementation of the SL modules in the academic year 2019–2020.

To gather data, we used interviews and a brief anonymous questionnaire. Interviews are a good option for exploring the participants' experiences. However, the anonymous questionnaire was intended to provide them a more secure opportunity to express doubts, worries, and negative feelings about their experience without fear of judgment or compromising the CUP. The first result of the study is that the experience of these community partners in SL was positive and valuable and that one of the most relevant difficulties that community partners experienced was related to time management, in particular participating in the activities that required them to move out of their organization. They rated difficulties overall low and did not report any negative experience. SL experience in community partners' perspective is qualified by positive relationships between the different actors involved, which contributes to making tutors feel valued and recognized as a point of reference. The positive, respectful relationship that community partners had with the faculty members and that they established with students contributed to the experience of being coeducators.

Seeing themselves as coeducators with the university (cf. Budhai, 2013) is a significant, although challenging, experience that motivates and supports continuous engagement in the CUP. That the community partners express an appreciation of their role in the education of students and see this role as one of the motivations for their involvement in the CUP, is significant. It moves beyond the dichotomy of "service" and "learning" spheres in this work and is a tangible manifestation of reciprocity and a deeper level of collaboration.

The coeducator relationship requires new patterns and norms of interaction between faculty and community partners. Participants used the interviews to critically reflect on the quality and the diverse components of their relationship with faculty. It became clear from their words that faculty members play a relevant role in the construction of a positive image of tutors' accountability and professionalism. Introducing tutors to students in a way that identifies the tutors' knowledge and their competencies potentially strengthens the extrinsic tutors' self-efficacy. This is a concrete expression of respect (d'Arlach et al., 2009) and relevance (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991), two of the Rs identified by Butin (2003) to make SL successful. Indeed, being valued and being supported have been reported as key elements needed to maintain a vital experiential learning environment. Support from faculty seems particularly relevant, especially when community partners have to engage for the first time in activities that are typical of SL (e.g., facilitate students' reflection) yet less common than the more typical work with students (i.e., internship). Tutoring students is not a joke. It is the most challenging aspect of SL, according to our participants, because it requires offering students a relevant and significant experience and asks for many capacities from the tutor's side. However, it is worth the effort. Tutors agree that SL contributes to students' education, offering them the chance to apply their knowledge while serving the community. They care about the firsthand (unique) knowledge they can offer to students, allowing them to dig into their specific realities. However, they also recognize that students' activities advance the organization's mission while directly impacting community members. The SL relationship between faculty and tutors thus needs more conceptualization and structure, as the roles are interrelated and the expectations for mutual learning are elevated. The idea that community partners might directly contribute to student learning, and that faculty might directly contribute to effective service delivery, requires the construction of new and more interpenetrable organizational systems and relationships, as the role of each of the actors in the process has evolved.

Participants acknowledge deriving many other advantages (motives and consequences at the same time) from SL: the opportunity to increase their social capital (i.e., expanding their network; Coleman & Danks, 2015) and grow their reputational capital, as working with the university brings a positive light to the work of the community-based organization. Participants constantly presented examples of how this experience had a positive impact on their professional lives and their organizations. Improved working practices, greater ease of innovation, and meaningful new perspectives are reported by community partners as outcomes of SL experiences. Benefits for students are also recognized, in terms of transferable skills and capacity to apply theories to real-life problems (Carrington et al., 2015). Based on the benefits that participants acknowledge, they are in favor of expanding SL in more

campuses and departments, implicitly supporting the idea of SL institutionalization.

Is SL all about mutual gain then? Yes and no. As Dostilio et al. (2012) pointed out, we need to have a more nuanced understanding of the concept of mutual gain. We need to have a more sophisticated understanding of reciprocity. For some of the tutors, particularly those who seized being coeducators of students as an opportunity, reciprocity is understood in more sophisticated ways (as influence and generative processes). Continuity plays an important role, as it helps tutors refine (from one year to another) the objectives of the SL experiences they offer and strengthen their learning and the learning of the students. Continuity offers faculty and community partners the concrete opportunity to engage in a continuous reflective process that goes on over the years.

Taken as a whole, our results contribute to a better understanding of the experiences of community partners while focusing on the importance of the coeducator role for partners, clarifying the major benefits they believe can derive from participating in these projects and articulating the different forms of reciprocity that occur.

Findings also allow us to understand how the four Rs are defined according to the community partners' perspective: (a) *respect* represents the baseline condition that allows building meaningful relationships with faculty (and with students). The quality of relationships, tangible benefits, intangible rewards, and the different domains of (b) *reciprocity* are the objects of community partners' (c) *reflection*, a timely process that can contribute to the decisions to "keep going" with SL or not. (d) *Relevance* is also part of the process of reflection: The CUP is formally renewed each semester, and community organizations decide to be partners, assessing their capacity to make a proposal that is relevant for the university, the students, and the community they work with. When an organization says, "No, this semester I cannot host students," it is usually because they fear they cannot offer a meaningful experience to students, given specific contingencies (e.g., lack of time to engage with students, other institutional tasks, etc.).

Limitations and Future Research

Different authors acknowledge the paucity of research on community partners' perspectives on SL. This shortcoming is especially evident in countries that have only recently adopted SL in higher education. Giving voice to a group of community partners involved in SL modules, offered by an Italian university that recently introduced SL in its curriculum, represents a contribution toward filling this gap.

Service-learning experiences can help the community grow, improving responsible leadership, transferring knowledge to innovate practices, and strengthening community partnerships (Stark, 2017), and our findings reflect this. Foreseeing dedicated moments to involve the SL community partners, to highlight their perspective, and to capture their narratives can elicit virtuous exchange within the CUP that, in turn, can reinforce the meaning of the SL experience.

We are aware that our results are based on a small group of participants, even if they represent the entire "population" of those who were involved as partners in the SL modules of the first semester. Given our small numbers, the statistical power of certain analyses (e.g., correlations) is weak, and our results can't be generalized. Nevertheless, they can offer some interesting insights for further validation with larger samples, in different universities and in countries with different SL practices.

Our results (both qualitative and quantitative) showed that CUP thrives on the caring attitude of faculty toward community partners, and the recognition of their needs, competence, and tacit knowledge. These attitudes contribute to the development of the four Rs, providing empirical support to Butin's model, looking at it from the community partners' perspective. Some improvements in this sense can be imagined. Based on the integration of qualitative and quantitative data, a more structured questionnaire could be developed, including the themes that emerged from the interviews (continuity, coeducational role) and more specific questions on the reciprocity dimensions of the SL CUPs. In this regard, other instruments from different research fields to measure the quality of collaboration in partnerships (Cicognani et al., 2020) or evaluate the community impact (Meringolo et al., 2019) can be included and adapted.

Such instruments, after further testing and validation with larger samples, could

be helpful to monitor community partners' perception of SL CUPs over time and to continuously improve the partnership process based on the community partners' insights and experiences. Having more effective tools to monitor and improve the partnership process, and to clarify the unique contributions of a SL CUP, can, in the long run, help higher education institutions make community-engaged SL a more effective and recognized manifestation of higher education's third mission (Kramer, 2000).

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Appendix A1. Community Partners Survey

I. We would like to gain your perspective about the service-learning experience that you joined as a community partner.

Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Service-learning positively contributed to students' education	O	O	O	O	O
2. Service-learning experience helped students to see how the subject matter they learn in the classroom can be applied in everyday life	O	O	O	O	O
3. Service-learning should be implemented into more classes and programs at the university	O	O	O	O	O
4. The goals of the course were clear to me	O	O	O	O	O
5. Service-learning students have been able to accomplish their assignment in my organization	O	O	O	O	O
6. The community served by our organization benefited from the activities of the service-learning students	O	O	O	O	O
7. Participation in the service-learning program made the university more aware of the needs in the community	O	O	O	O	O
8. I felt valued as a tutor by the university	O	O	O	O	O
9. I felt supported as a tutor by the university	O	O	O	O	O
10. I was able to develop a good relationship with the students in the SL course	O	O	O	O	O
11. I was able to develop a good relationship with the university staff	O	O	O	O	O
12. I saw myself as a point of reference to the students	O	O	O	O	O
13. Because of this experience, I am more interested in developing an extended partnership with the university	O	O	O	O	O

II. The next section is related to the tutor's role and related responsibilities.

Please indicate the level of difficulty of the following activities.

	Very easy	Easy	Neutral	Difficult	Very difficult
14. Evaluate students	O	O	O	O	O
15. Create and structure the activities	O	O	O	O	O
16. Facilitate students' reflection	O	O	O	O	O
17. Participate in the presentation of activities/projects for students	O	O	O	O	O
18. Participate in the monitoring meetings	O	O	O	O	O
19. Participate in the closing event of the activities	O	O	O	O	O
20. Monitor students' activities on the field	O	O	O	O	O
21. Share with students confidential information regarding users	O	O	O	O	O

III. The next section is related to the motivations that pushed you to join the service-learning community–university partnership.

Please indicate only the statements that are closer to your experience.

	No	Yes
22. I wanted to try something new	O	O
23. Positive prior experiences with students	O	O
24. Curiosity	O	O
25. Need for further resources	O	O
26. I was looking for a way to reflect on my work	O	O
27. I wanted a connection with the university	O	O
28. I have been encouraged by my colleagues	O	O
29. I wanted to contribute to the training of future psychologists	O	O
30. Other (please specify)	O	O

IV. The next section is related to the difficulties that you may have encountered along with the service-learning experience.

Please indicate only the statements that are closer to your experience.

	No	Yes
31. Time constraints of the academic world	O	O
32. Supervision of students	O	O
33. Training/orienting students	O	O
34. Communication with university faculty	O	O
35. Time devoted to students' supervision	O	O
36. Human, physical, and economic resources needed (used)	O	O
37. Other (please specify)		

V. Next section is related to the potential effects produced by hosting students into your organization.

Please indicate only the statements that are closer to your experience.

	No	Yes
38. SL saved me and my organization money, thanks to the presence of additional staff	O	O
39. Students brought new energy to the organization	O	O
40. Raised our public profile because of university involvement	O	O
41. Increased awareness of working procedures and approaches	O	O
42. Facilitated our access to academic resources	O	O
43. Facilitated networking with other community agencies	O	O
44. Made me more aware of some of my prejudices	O	O
45. Other (please specify)	O	O

VI. Next section is dedicated to a deeper reflection on the effects (either positive or negative) that were produced by the community–university partnership.	
Please use this space to report positive effects.	Please use this space to report negative effects.
VII. Please use this space to share any further consideration on the Service-Learning experience.	
VIII. Final section	

	No	**Yes**
Would you be interested in continuing your collaboration with the university?	O	O