



# THE PRACTICE OF UNIVERSITY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND GENERAL EDUCATION: PROMOTING COMMUNITY COLLABORATION AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT THROUGH MICRO-COURSES

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## Abstract

*In an era of growing emphasis on sustainable development and the social responsibility of higher education, universities are increasingly seeking innovative ways to integrate learning with community engagement. This study aims to integrate University Social Responsibility (USR) with general education through micro-courses focused on Community-Based Tourism (CBT) within a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework. A research team from National Chiayi University collaborated closely with the Haomei community in Taiwan over a two-year period to co-develop courses covering religious traditions, industrial culture, historical heritage, and ecological conservation. These courses provided students with immersive, hands-on learning experiences. A total of 78 students from 28 academic disciplines participated, enhancing their sense of social responsibility and community engagement. The findings reveal five key factors essential for successful university-community collaboration: trust building, shared objectives, continuous communication, resource sharing, and adaptability. The study demonstrates that integrating USR with innovative educational practices can drive universities to become agents of social change. This model not only strengthens student learning and engagement but also promotes sustainable community development, offering a valuable framework for higher education institutions worldwide.*

**Keywords:** university social responsibility, community-based tourism, participatory action research, general education, university-community collaboration

## Introduction

As societal expectations for higher education institutions continue to rise, universities worldwide are increasingly viewed not only as central hubs for the dissemination of knowledge but also as pivotal agents of social change. University Social Responsibility (USR) has emerged as a concrete means of fulfilling this role and has become one of the global trends in higher education development (Amutuhair, 2023; Jones et al., 2021; Pactwa et al., 2024). The promotion of USR emphasizes responding to societal needs and highlights universities' active role in addressing global challenges such as climate change and social inequality (Dias, 2024; Liu, 2023). Against this backdrop, universities in Taiwan are gradually integrating into this international trend and actively exploring local implementations of USR (Chen, 2022; Tseng & Lin, 2022).

Over the past two years (from July 2022 to July 2024), a team from National Chiayi University has engaged deeply with local communities, working closely with residents to promote an innovative model of education and social practice that combines Micro-Courses

in General Education, Community-Based Tourism (CBT), and Participatory Action Research (PAR). These micro-courses include topics such as religious beliefs, industrial culture, cultural history, and natural ecology, all framed under the concept of sustainable tourism. They provide students with opportunities to engage with real community settings, enriching their learning experiences and deepening their understanding and involvement in social issues, thus embodying the core spirit of USR.

This study documents and analyzes the process of relationship-building, collaborative planning, execution, and reflection between National Chiayi University and the community, summarizing the key factors for successful collaboration. Through the integration of USR, micro-courses in general education, CBT, and PAR, National Chiayi University has strengthened its ties with the community and has promoted the holistic development of its students. It has also played a significant role in advancing sustainable development.

## Literature Review

The practical experiences of National Chiayi University demonstrate how a university can effectively combine Micro-Courses in General Education, Community-Based Tourism (CBT), and Participatory Action Research (PAR) to promote University Social Responsibility (USR) and respond to societal needs. This provides a valuable reference for the present study. Therefore, this chapter reviews relevant literature to explore how universities, through general education and social practice, can foster collaborative development with communities.

### *University Social Responsibility*

University Social Responsibility (USR) refers to a university's proactive efforts to address societal needs through education, research, and social service, with the aim of promoting social justice, enhancing social well-being, and advancing sustainable development (Özdemir, 2024; Valencia-Arias et al., 2024). As societal expectations for higher education institutions have increased, universities are now seen as not only centers for the dissemination of knowledge but also as driving forces for social change (Amutuhaire, 2023; Jones et al., 2021; Pactwa et al., 2024). In Taiwan, the promotion of USR has largely relied on government policies, such as the "Higher Education Sprout Project" initiated in 2008. Universities have actively responded to and participated in these initiatives, but they have often been led by university personnel, focusing on actions and achievements from the university's perspective. This unidirectional implementation model may lead to limitations, failing to fully capture the bidirectional interaction between universities and communities (Hsing & Huang, 2023). Internationally, particularly in Europe, the development of USR began earlier. Universities have actively engaged with global challenges such as climate change and social inequality through the promotion of USR, emphasizing collaboration with communities to explore joint solutions (Coelho & Menezes, 2020; Hsing & Huang, 2023; Landholm et al., 2019).

In contrast, Taiwan's USR initiatives remain predominantly university-centered, and deep collaboration with communities has yet to be fully realized. Existing research largely focuses on "what the university has done," while discussions on "how to work together with the community" are still insufficient (Hsing & Huang, 2023).

### *The Innovative Integration of Micro-Courses in General Education and CBT*

General education aims to cultivate students' holistic development, promoting a balanced growth in knowledge, skills, and attitudes to address complex social issues (Antiado et al., 2020; Ye et al., 2022). As an innovative form of general education, micro-courses are

characterized by their high flexibility and concise content, providing students with efficient learning experiences within a short period of time (Bangor et al., 2023). In Taiwan, micro-courses have become an essential component of general education, with many universities integrating them as a core element of curriculum design. These courses cover both traditional and interdisciplinary topics, helping students adapt to a rapidly changing social environment (Chiu, 2018). The versatility of micro-courses allows them to be delivered in various formats, making it possible to create a novel model by integrating them with Community-Based Tourism (CBT). Given that CBT is characterized by community-led initiatives, the preservation of local culture, the promotion of environmental sustainability, and the enhancement of community well-being (Balen et al., 2024; Kurniadinata & Suhartini, 2024), this combination enriches students' learning experiences and understanding of community needs, while also fostering close collaboration between universities and communities.

### *An Innovative Model of Education and Social Practice*

This study explores the integration of University Social Responsibility (USR), micro-courses in general education, Community-Based Tourism (CBT), and Participatory Action Research (PAR) to create a unique model of education and social practice. While this approach is rarely discussed in the current literature, this study believes it holds significant value for multiple reasons.

Firstly, USR, as a core concept for universities in responding to societal needs, emphasizes that universities should be not only disseminators of knowledge but also active agents of social change (Sharmil et al., 2021; Snapp et al., 2023; Hall Moran et al., 2023). However, traditional USR practices often center on the university itself, lacking deep interaction with the community (Hsing & Huang, 2023). By integrating micro-courses, this model changes the dynamic. Micro-courses provide a flexible and targeted learning platform that allows students to acquire critical knowledge and skills in a relatively short time and apply them in real-world social contexts. This not only enhances students' learning outcomes but also promotes their active participation in social issues, embodying the true spirit of USR.

Secondly, micro-courses play a crucial role in the practice of USR. These flexible and efficient courses enable students to quickly master diverse knowledge and skills, which they can then apply in real social situations, thereby enhancing their understanding of and engagement with societal issues (Bangor et al., 2023). When combined with CBT, micro-courses can cover a wide range of areas, including religion, culture, history, and ecology, deepening students' understanding of community needs, promoting their participation in local economic and cultural preservation, and bridging the university with the community to achieve sustainable development.

Finally, PAR emphasizes the collaborative partnership between researchers and community members (Sharmil et al., 2021), providing a solid theoretical foundation for the integration of USR, micro-courses, and CBT. Through PAR, universities can not only better understand community needs but also co-design and implement solutions with the community. This bidirectional interaction not only fosters students' sense of social responsibility but also ensures the sustainability and effectiveness of university-community collaboration.

The integration of University Social Responsibility (USR), micro-courses, Community-Based Tourism (CBT), and Participatory Action Research (PAR) forms an innovative educational model that addresses the lack of mutual engagement between universities and communities, enhancing their role in sustainable development. This study examines how universities can shift from isolated actors to active community partners. By designing micro-courses and using participatory methods, the model improves student outcomes and promotes meaningful collaboration with communities. The research aims to explore how this approach

fosters enduring partnerships and identify key success factors, positioning universities as active agents in global sustainability rather than mere knowledge providers.

Specifically, this study sought to explore the following questions based on the in-depth community practice experience of National Chiayi University:

How can the integration of USR and general education enhance students' sense of social responsibility? This includes the design and implementation of micro-courses combined with community-based tourism to enhance students' understanding and active engagement with social issues.

How can universities and communities advance deep collaboration? By analyzing the practical process, this study aims to provide important references for future practitioners and researchers.

What factors contribute to successful collaboration between universities and communities? This study will examine the key success factors in the long-term and deep collaborative process between National Chiayi University and the community.

## Research Methodology

### *Design*

This study employed Participatory Action Research (PAR) as its primary research methodology. The core of PAR lay not only in problem-solving but also in emphasizing the collaborative participation of all community stakeholders throughout the research process (Sharmil et al., 2021). Additionally, PAR involved an iterative process of continuously adjusting and optimizing strategies to ensure that the actions taken genuinely reflected the unique needs and characteristics of the community (Snapp et al., 2023; Woelders & Abma, 2019), with the ultimate goal of fostering social change (Hall Moran et al., 2023; Sharmil et al., 2021; Snapp et al., 2023).

This study specifically focused on the practical challenges encountered during the process of community collaboration. Over the past two years, the research team deeply engaged with the community, working alongside residents to co-design and implement micro-courses centered on Community-Based Tourism (CBT). In the research design, this study utilized multiple cycles of action, including planning, execution, reflection, and revision, to gradually develop a teaching model that was well-suited to the actual conditions of the community. This approach not only facilitated collaboration between the community and the university but also provided students with more concrete and actionable learning experiences. The design and implementation of the courses fully embodied the theoretical framework of PAR, and the choice of this research method helped clarify the core processes of this study, offering valuable insights for future related research. The study's methods are suitable for resource-limited settings requiring long-term community engagement, providing references for addressing community development challenges.

### *Participants*

The action research team consisted of two main categories of members: the university team and the community partners, with a total of ten members:

University Team Members: There were seven members in this group. The first member served as the executive director of the HISP project at National Chiayi University, under the National Science and Technology Council. This person is a university professor with expertise in education, responsible for leading and making decisions for the entire action plan (referred to as Member One). The second member, also a university professor, served as the project executive

secretary with a background in community psychology, tasked with coordinating and advancing the project (referred to as Member Two). The team included three postdoctoral researchers who were responsible for on-site implementation, planning, executing, and promoting the project. Their areas of expertise included tourism, geography, and the history of education (referred to as Members Three, Four, and Five). Additionally, there were two full-time project assistants with expertise in tourism and the arts, as well as administrative experience, who were responsible for the administrative aspects of the project (referred to as Members Six and Seven).

**Community Partners:** This group consisted of three members. The first two members had lived in the community for over forty years and were among the earliest community members to form partnerships with the university team (referred to as Partner One and Partner Two). Partner One had experience as a community tour guide and worked in the tourism industry, while Partner Two was the main operator of a community gathering place, with extensive connections within the community. The third member was the only local community partner running a tourism business (referred to as Business Partner One), who had a strong sense of community awareness but, as a small business owner, required diverse support from partners.

In PAR, it is important to clarify the roles throughout the process, particularly in distinguishing between initiators and supporters, as well as researchers and practitioners:

**Initiators and Supporters:** In this action plan, the university played the role of initiator due to its mission to deeply engage in University Social Responsibility (USR) and innovate general education. The university also acted as a supporter, receiving manpower and budgetary support from the National Science and Technology Council and the university itself. However, the community partners were not passive participants; they were also initiators, driven by the need for sustainable development, innovative community economics, cultural preservation, and increased community vitality and visibility. Lacking the necessary human resources, they required the involvement of the university team. Community partners contributed essential resources such as local knowledge, cultural awareness, and personal networks, which were crucial to the successful implementation of USR in the community. Thus, the community also played a supportive role.

**Researchers and Practitioners:** Within this action plan, the university team's postdoctoral researchers were directly responsible for research, which required them to be stationed in the community long-term, conducting in-depth observations, interviews, and data analysis. They were primarily responsible for research design, data collection, and result analysis, representing the typical researcher role. As for practitioners, the community partners, along with the university's postdoctoral researchers and full-time assistants, were directly involved in the action cycles, making them active participants in the practical implementation. The other university team members, who also had university duties and day-to-day responsibilities, played a supporting role in the practical aspects of the project.

### *Setting and Participants*

The Haomei area boasts a history of nearly 400 years, having once been the entrance to the Dao-feng Inland Sea in the 16th century. Its strategic geographical location attracted pirates, merchants, and immigrants vying for control. Over time, due to multiple changes in the river's course, the inner sea vanished, leading to significant transformations in the area's natural environment and cultural history. Today, Haomei is rich in cultural and ecological resources, including the Ming Dynasty Mazu Temple and a nationally recognized wetland. The community has also been recognized for its self-initiated beach conservation efforts, which have been ongoing for nearly a decade and have won multiple awards, demonstrating the area's significant potential for sustainable community-based tourism (CBT). In recent years, the region has become a popular tourist destination due to the emergence of a painted village and social



media hotspots, but this surge in tourism quickly faded due to a lack of sustainable planning. Nevertheless, the residents continue to hope that tourism can revitalize the local economy and community vitality. In response, the university team collaborated with the community, integrating University Social Responsibility (USR) and general education practices with the concept of sustainable CBT. Together, they developed a one-day micro-course that explores Haomei, aiming to provide students with a comprehensive experience of the community's culture, history, geography, industries, religion, and sustainability efforts. The goal is to foster students' cultural awareness and attention to social issues, while also enhancing community participation and empowerment, thereby creating opportunities for fair benefit distribution as a concrete action of USR.

The participants in this action research were primarily students enrolled in the "Discovering Chiayi" Micro-Courses at National Chiayi University. This course is part of a newly established general education series, created in September 2022, with the goals of promoting sustainability, innovation, localization, and fulfilling the university's social responsibility. The course is centered around four main themes: mountains, seas, cities, and campuses of Chiayi, offering more than ten micro-course routes. The participants were mostly undergraduate students from first-year to final-year, with the option to enroll in up to four micro-courses. Each route consists of 9 hours of coursework, and students can earn 0.5 credits per route, with a maximum of 2 credits. The university expects that students, after completing these courses, will develop a sense of local care and sustainability awareness. The course was offered once each semester over three semesters from September 2022 to June 2024, with a total of 78 participants from 28 different departments. This research utilized both qualitative and quantitative feedback from the participating students as one of the research bases to verify the course's effectiveness and the achievement of its objectives.

#### *Data Collection and Analysis*

This participatory action research primarily employed qualitative analysis, focusing on thematic analysis of the action plan's development and implementation, supplemented by quantitative analysis. The focus of the qualitative analysis was on documenting the process of constructing and implementing the action plan by the action team over the course of two years. The data sources mainly included records of discussions and reflections between the team and community partners, as well as qualitative data from student feedback questionnaires (as shown in Table 1). For qualitative analysis, this study adopted the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This involved repeatedly reading the raw data, identifying significant phrases, and extracting concise key phrases. This study then iteratively reviewed these key phrases, grouping similar phrases into subthemes, and subsequently abstracting higher-level themes based on the relationships between the subthemes. Finally, by repeatedly cross-examining the various data categories, this study refined the relationships between the themes, forming the highest-level categories, which constituted the basic framework for writing the research report. The quantitative data, derived from the results of quantitative questions in student questionnaires, were used to support the interpretation of the qualitative data.

**Table 1**  
*Summary of Qualitative Data Management Codes*

Data Source	Coding Method	Example
Field Notes	Notes-Date-Subject	Notes-2022-10-19-Partner Two
Weekly Meeting Report Records	Weekly Report-Date-Subject	Weekly Report-2023-6-6-Member Two
Participation in Micro-Course Satisfaction Survey	Satisfaction Survey-Survey Date	Satisfaction Survey-2023-5-6
Community Awareness Questionnaire	Community Awareness Questionnaire-Survey Date	Community Awareness Questionnaire-2023-10-20
Learning Effectiveness Questionnaire	Learning Effectiveness Questionnaire-Survey Date	Learning Effectiveness Questionnaire-2024-3-30

*Data Reliability*

The reliability of the data in this study was ensured using triangulation, as employed by Dymond et al. (2006) in participatory action research, to guarantee the trustworthiness of the research findings. This study conducted cross-verification through multiple data sources and different coders. For the consistency reliability analysis of qualitative data, the initial coding was performed by the primary researcher. Subsequently, a research assistant randomly selected one-third of the data from each source for consistency coding checks. Any discrepancies that arose during the coding process were discussed between the researcher and the research assistant to reassess and clarify the appropriateness of the coding. This approach was implemented to ensure consistency and accuracy in data analysis.

**Research Results**

*The Process of Constructing and Implementing the Action Plan*

This action plan was developed through collaboration with local residents to create general education micro-courses grounded in sustainable tourism principles. The courses, centered around community-based tourism (CBT), addressed topics such as religious beliefs, industrial culture, cultural history, and natural ecology, with an emphasis on active participation in sustainable practices. These micro-courses aimed not only to enhance university students' learning experiences but also to foster early-stage interactions and collaborations between the project team and residents.

According to the World Tourism Organization, sustainable tourism considers economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities (UNWTO, 2017). CBT, a sustainable tourism form, highlights local residents' leadership in tourism planning and management, ensuring equitable benefit distribution and supporting local economic growth. It prioritizes cultural and natural resource preservation, limits overdevelopment, and promotes environmental awareness. CBT fosters sustainability by enhancing cultural exchange and strengthening community identity and pride. These principles shaped the foundation of this study action plan.

The planning process of this prototype action plan followed the six stages outlined in the systematic tourism planning model by Gunn (1994), which provides a structured approach to effective tourism development.

1. Setting Objectives, this study action steps were as follows:

- (1) This study initially discussed implementing CBT principles during team meetings, continuously reminding each other throughout the process. For example: "Tai Sheng Temple has a long history of 400 years, and having the temple staff conduct the tours would be the best way to showcase it. However, they have limited experience in guiding university groups and may not know how to start, so some training might be necessary. Although it will take time to persuade them to participate, this is an essential step in implementing the principle of community participation, and it's something this study needs to do." (Weekly Report-2022-10-31-Member Two). This study needs to assess whether the community, after experiencing a rapid rise and fall in popularity, is committed to pursuing sustainable, long-term development. Through discussions with residents, this study confirmed their support for this vision. For instance, a local business owner noted in a casual conversation that. 'We were Taiwan's first 3D painted village, but as long as someone can paint and a village is willing to be painted, similar tourist spots can emerge. Our tourist flow dissipated in less than two years, but I truly believe that our natural and cultural resources, along with our sustainability efforts, are second to none. I hope that through this initiative, we can find a lasting and suitable direction for developing tourism again.'" (Field Notes-2022-10-28-Business Partner One).
- (2) Collected Villagers' Opinions: We gathered collaborative opinions through formal meetings, including pre-project consultations with community leaders, and informal consultations during implementation. By being stationed in the village, this study engaged in conversations with residents to gather valuable insights on development. For example, "Our windbreak forest is beautiful. Inside the forest, there is a small lake with fallen trees, and when the blue sky reflects on the water, it creates a stunning view. The villagers refer to it as a hidden gem. We have more to offer than just the painted walls in the village; we have many resources that can be developed for tourism." (Field Notes-2022-10-19-Partner Two)".
- (3) Team Member Discussions: Stationed partners attended weekly office meetings and monthly project meetings, sharing information gathered from the community. These discussions helped adjust approaches and build consensus on the community practice plan. "Based on the feedback gathered this week, there is a strong consensus within the community about redeveloping tourism. However, the key challenge moving forward is how to transform them from storytellers into our partners" (Weekly Report-2022-10-31-Member One).

2. Data Collection and Analysis, the steps taken during this phase are outlined as follows:

- (1) Data Collection and Preliminary Research: Before entering the community in July 2022, this study collected information on Haomei's resources, conditions, and heritage through various sources. In September, this study reviewed the cultural history, producing a key document for understanding the local context.
- (2) Site Visits: To verify the preliminary research and assess tourism potential, this study visited the key people, places, events, and objects mentioned in the texts and discussed with community partners the feasibility of including these elements in the tour planning. For example, one partner noted... "The legendary pirate treasure site is currently a cemetery in the wilderness, and there are actually some local taboos about entering the area, so it might not be suitable for students to visit yet." (Field Notes-2022-09-20-Partner Three)
- (3) Analysis and Discussion: In planning the micro-course in September 2022, this study analyzed the collected data, observations, and community partners' opinions, assessing the current conditions and limitations of various resources. For example, one partner remarked "Digging for clams is something locals did a lot when they were kids. Visitors



usually just eat clams but never know that clams live in the sand and have to be dug out." (Field Notes-2022-10-26-Partner One); another partner added, "Since digging for clams requires some skill, visitors often have a lot of fun once they learn how. Clams are especially abundant in the intertidal zone, but it's only safe to go in during low tide, so we need to consider the tide schedule in our planning." (Field Notes-2022-11-02-Business Partner One); another observation was, "The village roads are mostly narrow lanes, making it difficult to navigate with a large bus, but we've been getting in and out of here for over 40-50 years, so we know the best and safest routes." (Field Notes-2022-01-26-Partner Two).

3. Synthesis: The steps taken in this phase are outlined as follows:

- (1) Confirmation of Course Specifications: To ensure tour quality and comply with the regulations and budget set by the university and the National Science and Technology Council, as well as bus capacity limits, this study capped the number of students at 35, establishing a clear framework for itinerary design.
- (2) Community Resources Availability: this study investigation confirmed that the community, with its 400-year history, offers rich natural, cultural, and industrial resources suitable for a 9-hour student learning experience. Community partners provided support, including venues, seating, refreshments, restrooms, aquaculture observations, and guided tours, secured through their local connections. With these resources confirmed, this study moved to the creative planning phase.
- (3) Creative Conceptualization: To deepen students' understanding of local knowledge and foster cultural care, this study designed a one-day community experience focused on nature, culture, religion, industry, and sustainability, distinct from typical tours. The experience had two features: tours led by community partners to enhance authenticity, with locals sharing their stories, and hands-on activities like traditional clam harvesting and community-led beach conservation efforts, including driftwood removal, planting vegetation, and beach cleanups.

4. Policy and Plan Formulation:

- (1) Policy Direction: Focusing on University Social Responsibility (USR) and general education, this initiative involves designing micro-courses on Community-Based Tourism (CBT) through collaboration between the university's team and local residents. Courses will explore local beliefs, industrial culture, history, and ecology, and promote sustainable actions. The goals include enriching student learning, enhancing social awareness, fostering university-community cooperation, and supporting cultural preservation, community tourism, and sustainable resilience.
- (2) Plan Formulation: Based on the context described above, this study developed the following plan (as shown in Table 2), which has been approved by the university for recruiting students to participate in the micro-courses.

**Table 2**  
*Community Tourism One-Day Tour Product Content*

Tour Name	Tour Content
Budai Haomeili Exploration: One-Day Tour	Unit 1: Coastal Community Religious Pilgrimage (3 hours) Discover Wanggang Tai Sheng Temple, home to Taiwan's only Mazu statue certified as a National Historic Relic, explore coastal Wangye beliefs, and enjoy free exploration of the village's landmarks, including Five Camps, Jiatou Temple, and 3D murals.
	Unit 2: Coastal Community Ecological Tour (3 hours 40 minutes) Learn about the windbreak forest ecosystem, Haomei Beach's conservation efforts, and participate in sustainable beach conservation activities.
	Unit 3: Coastal Community Industry Tour (2 hours 20 minutes) Explore cultural and creative industries, visit boat houses, tour natural seawater tidal aquaculture facilities, and engage in industry experience activities.

Implementation (July 2022 - June 2024): The course was implemented three times with full enrollment each time, following a cycle of implementation, review, re-planning, and re-implementation, in collaboration with key community stakeholders:

(1) Local Knowledge Collection: Community members contributed oral histories and local books, while university experts verified and curated data from historical, geographical, and forestry perspectives.

(2) Data Integration and Digital Preservation: Digital content design experts managed the integration, digital preservation, web design, database creation, and the design of guides and souvenirs.

(3) Tourism and Educational Value Extraction: University experts in tourism and education extracted valuable information, planned itineraries, and conducted marketing and guide training.

(4) Logistical Support: The project office managed logistics, including food, transportation, and necessary tour support.

(5) Guiding and Interpretation: Community residents and local tourism operators led the guiding and interpretation based on their expertise.

(6) Product Coordination and Promotion: Postdoctoral researchers and project assistants with tourism expertise coordinated and promoted the overall product development and implementation.

(7) Monitoring and Evaluation: Continuous monitoring and evaluation were conducted to ensure the course met its objectives, with adjustments made as needed. Key tools included post-experience questionnaires: Micro-Course Satisfaction: Participants rated their satisfaction with the tour on a 5-point Likert scale, from "Very Satisfied" to "Very Dissatisfied". "Community Awareness: Assessed students' understanding of community aspects such as culture, history, and ecology, with responses categorized as "Yes," "Average," or "No. "Learning Effectiveness: This questionnaire assessed the micro-course's impact on credit accumulation, learning motivation, broadening of learning fields, and course flexibility. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree," with 5 being the highest score.

### *Feedback from Students and Community Partners*

#### 1. Student Feedback

Quantitative Feedback: A total of 78 participants from 28 departments provided feedback across three course implementations, showing changes in satisfaction and learning effectiveness over time (statistical tables in the appendix):

- (1) Micro-Course Satisfaction: The average score was 4.72/5, peaking at 4.79 in May 2023. Scores slightly declined to 4.77 in October 2023 and 4.61 in March 2024, indicating a gradual drop in satisfaction.
- (2) Community Awareness: On average, 90% of participants answered "Yes" to awareness questions. Geographical awareness reached 100% in two surveys, while cultural awareness improved from 83% in May 2023 to 93% in March 2024, showing steady progress.
- (3) Learning Effectiveness: The overall score was 4.75/5, peaking at 4.85 in May 2023, then slightly decreasing to 4.63 in October 2023 and March 2024. Despite positive outcomes, the slight decline suggests a need for instructional adjustments to sustain engagement.

Qualitative Feedback: Students highly valued hands-on activities like clam digging and marine debris removal, which increased environmental awareness and provided a sense of accomplishment. The Tai Sheng Temple tour deepened their interest in local culture and the Taiwanese language. Feedback highlighted the impact of weather, break scheduling, and outdoor activity timing. Interactions with residents offered insights into the fishing village lifestyle, inspiring students to engage more with community life and seek further immersion opportunities (Appendix Table 4).

#### 2. Feedback from Community Partners:

Community partners provided valuable feedback on the course design, implementation, and collaboration experience, which contributed to the course's success. They appreciated the unique approach, allowing students to engage deeply with the community's forest, beach, and temple, and participate in long-term beach conservation efforts. However, some partners noted that the heat affected student participation and suggested adding more water stations. While partners enjoyed the collaboration, some guides expressed the need for additional training to better share community stories. Overall, partners felt respected and valued the university's respect for their customs and beliefs, highlighting the need for ongoing course improvements and stronger community collaboration (see Appendix Table 5 for detailed feedback).

#### 3. Challenges in Recruiting Community Partners:

While recruiting community partners, this study faced challenges with low participation. For example, one resident noted: "Making money is important to us; we rarely do things just because they are 'meaningful'" (Field Notes-2022-10-19-Partner Two). This mindset reflects uncertainty about the future, with residents prioritizing production and capital accumulation. To address this, this study implemented two strategies: This study began with residents aligned with the university's values, using them to promote goodwill and invite like-minded individuals to join. This study used the "Do, Observe, Disseminate, Invite" (D.O.D.I.) strategy—acting first, observing reactions, sharing information, and repeatedly inviting collaboration. This approach gradually led to significant changes.

"To be honest, I wasn't sure about your intentions at first. I didn't think something so good could just come to our community out of nowhere. But seeing your careful planning and the fact that you brought in students, and not just once, I was really moved. So, I decided to join and see what I could contribute." (Field Notes-2024-6-7-Partner One). "In fact, the community

is gradually becoming more interested in what you're doing. For example, some residents have brought free water for the students, and there are discounts on food and drinks at local shops. They've been touched by your efforts and wanted to say thank you." (Field Notes-2024-6-7-Partner Two). "I've supported you from the beginning, but many people in the village still don't understand your good intentions. Whenever I get a chance at our gatherings, I talk about your plans to increase awareness and get more people involved in this good work." (Field Notes-2024-6-28-Partner Three).

## Discussion

Based on this study experience from this action research, this study identified five key factors that contributed to successful collaboration with community partners. These factors have established a solid foundation for university-community cooperation and continue to promote the successful implementation of the course:

1. Building Trust:

Studies by Sanna et al. (2024), Hifdzi and Tukiman (2023), and Riyanto and Supriono (2023) emphasize the importance of building trust at the outset of collaboration. This study's findings supported this, revealing that through prolonged interaction and communication, community partners gradually came to understand and trust the intentions and capabilities of the university team. This trust motivated them to invest time and resources and actively participate in the design and execution of the course. For example, after implementing this study's partner recruitment strategy, as the community increasingly recognized the sincerity and efforts of the university team, their initial doubts were gradually dispelled, which led to active participation and support.

2. Shared Goals:

Prasetyo and Asmara (2024) highlighted that establishing shared goals is essential for effective collaboration between community partners and university teams. This aligned with our findings, as both parties in this course design had agreed on principles such as sustainable development, local characteristics, mutual cooperation, and enhancing students' understanding of community issues. They shared the vision that a course designed around community tourism could promote community development and cultural preservation while advancing the practice of university social responsibility and general education.

3. Continuous Communication and Feedback:

Weekly and monthly meetings allowed the team and community partners to regularly share progress, discuss issues, and propose solutions. This continuous communication ensured the smooth progress of the course and enabled timely resolution of any challenges. The importance of ongoing communication and feedback for smooth collaboration during course implementation was supported by Silva (2023) and Prasetyo and Asmara (2024).

4. Resource Sharing and Collaboration:

The sharing of resources and collaboration during course design and implementation was another critical factor for success, as noted in studies by Prasetyo and Asmara (2024) and Riyanto and Supriono (2023). Community partners provided rich local resources, such as natural landscapes, cultural heritage, and human stories, along with essential local support, which aligned with the findings of these studies. This study also found that the university team contributed professional knowledge and technical assistance. By sharing resources and collaborating, both sides successfully completed the course design and implementation.

5. Flexibility and Innovation:

Strategies involving flexibility and innovation were crucial in addressing challenges during implementation, as proposed by Sitikarn (2021) and Yuliane and Sholeh (2022). As discussed in the previous section on implementation, these strategies led to positive outcomes, such

as enhanced student learning efficiency, increased community participation, and enriched university practice experience. These findings aligned with the scholars' emphasis on the importance of flexibility and innovation.

Although the existing literature provided limited discussion on how universities engage deeply in community practices, this study addressed this gap by offering concrete practical experiences based on these five key factors. These experiences, supported by partners' reactions and actions, provide substantial evidence for future university-community collaboration practices and enrich the theoretical framework.

Furthermore, the educational significance of our findings is closely tied to an international perspective. For instance, Birzina and Kalnina (2023) emphasized the importance of fostering inquiry-based thinking and collaboration skills to tackle complex real-world challenges. Määttä and Uusiautti (2016) pointed out that learning environments and motivation are critical to student success, which aligned with these study findings on the positive impact of integrating community resources to enhance student motivation. Chao (2023) underscored the value of resource sharing and practical activities, which further supported this study emphasis on the educational and societal benefits of such collaborations. Additionally, Kronberga and Bite (2010) discussed how university social responsibility extends beyond academic knowledge to include active community engagement and sustainable societal impact, which paralleled this study approach of using micro-courses to promote community development. These international studies provide a strong foundation for this study, enriching the theoretical framework and offering new perspectives for university-community partnerships worldwide.

## Conclusions and Implications

This study successfully created a highly synergistic model of education and social practice by integrating University Social Responsibility (USR), general education micro-courses, Community-Based Tourism (CBT), and Participatory Action Research (PAR). Through two years of collaboration, National Chiayi University and the local community achieved a deep integration of community development and student learning by repeatedly implementing, reflecting on, and adjusting the program.

The study not only identified five key factors—building trust, shared goals, continuous communication and feedback, resource sharing and collaboration, and flexibility and innovation—that are critical to the successful practice of USR but also compiled practical processes, particularly the lessons learned from multiple action cycles, which are of significant reference value for future practitioners. Whether in the university's promotion of social responsibility or in specific actions in collaboration with the community, this research provides a clear operational framework and implementation pathway, laying the foundation for future practitioners and researchers.

This study has several limitations that should be considered cautiously when interpreting the results. First, the sample size and geographic focus may limit the generalizability of the findings. Second, while the two-year study period allowed for the observation of short-term effects, the long-term impact has not yet been fully validated. Third, the depth and breadth of community participation varied, and some members' needs were not fully reflected, affecting the comprehensiveness of the conclusions. Additionally, the application of the PAR methodology presents challenges in balancing power dynamics and subjectivity, which may influence the objectivity and applicability of the results. Finally, the study relied on specific resources and external conditions, which may not be replicable in other contexts. Future research should explore these limitations in greater depth to enhance the generalizability and applicability of the findings.



### Implications

The findings of this study have important implications for both researchers and practitioners engaged in university-community collaborations:

1. For Researchers:

**Strengthen University-Community Collaboration Mechanisms:** Future research should explore ways to optimize university-community collaboration models, emphasizing sustainability and expanding these practices to diverse settings.

**Expand the Scope of Micro-Course Topics:** Researchers are encouraged to design micro-courses that address current social issues, building on the practical experiences of this study to promote meaningful social engagement among students.

**Promote the Methodology of Participatory Action Research:** The detailed steps and strategies of the PAR methodology outlined in this research can serve as a guide for driving social innovation and change in various fields.

2. For Practitioners:

**Enhance Community Engagement and Empowerment:** Practitioners can draw from the experiences compiled in this study to foster a sense of participation and empowerment among community members, ensuring projects deliver tangible benefits to local residents.

**Adapt Flexibly to Challenges in Practice:** The analysis of challenges and solutions provided in this study serves as a resource for practitioners to navigate unforeseen situations, facilitating project success and goal achievement.

**Establish Continuous Feedback and Improvement Mechanisms:** Practitioners should implement the feedback mechanisms suggested in this study, regularly assessing and refining project progress to maximize effectiveness and impact.

The study's broader international relevance lies in its framework for university-community engagement, particularly in the context of sustainable development and cultural preservation. The identified factors of trust, shared goals, continuous communication, resource sharing, and flexible strategies can serve as a model for universities worldwide. As higher education institutions increasingly focus on social responsibility, this research contributes to global discussions on how universities can collaborate effectively with local communities to enhance student learning and support sustainable community tourism.

### Acknowledgements

The authors express their sincere gratitude to the Ministry of Science and Technology (Project No.: MOST 111-2420-H-415-002-HSI) for providing financial support for this research project.

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Appendices

**Table 1**  
*Micro-Course Participation Satisfaction Survey*

Question	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Very Unsatisfied	Total Participants	Average Score	Tour Date
How would you rate the overall experience of the tour you participated in?	19	3	1	0	0	23	4.79	2023/5/6
	22	5	1	0	0	28	4.77	2023/10/20
	17	9	1	0	0	27	4.61	2024/3/30
Total	58	17	3	0	0	78	4.72	

**Table 2**  
*Statistics of Community Awareness Questionnaire for Micro-Course Participants*

Question						
After attending this course, has your understanding and knowledge of the following aspects of this route improved?	Date	Yes	Average	No	% Yes	Total
Humanities Aspect	2023-5-6	20	3	0	87	23
Historical Aspect		22	1	0	96	23
Geographical Aspect		23	0	0	100	23
Ecological Aspect		22	1	0	96	23
Industrial Aspect		22	1	0	96	23
Community Development Aspect		21	2	0	91	23
Cultural Aspect		19	4	0	83	23
Subtotal		--	--	--	94	--
Humanities Aspect	2023-10-20	27	1	0	96	28
Historical Aspect		26	2	0	93	28
Geographical Aspect		27	1	0	96	28
Ecological Aspect		27	1	0	96	28
Industrial Aspect		24	4	0	86	28
Community Development Aspect		24	4	0	86	28
Cultural Aspect		24	4	0	86	28
Subtotal		--	--	--	91	--

Question						
After attending this course, has your understanding and knowledge of the following aspects of this route improved?						
	Date	Yes	Average	No	% Yes	Total
Humanities Aspect	2024-5-30	24	3	0	89	27
Historical Aspect		26	1	0	96	27
Geographical Aspect		27	0	0	100	27
Ecological Aspect		26	1	0	96	27
Industrial Aspect		26	1	0	96	27
Community Development Aspect		25	2	0	93	27
Cultural Aspect		25	2	0	93	27
Subtotal		--	--	--	95	--
Overall Average			90			
Total Participants			78			

**Table 3**  
*Statistics of Learning Effectiveness Questionnaire for Micro-Course Participants*

No.	Question Content	2023-5-6	2023-10-20	2024-5-30
		Average Score		
1	Taking micro-credit courses allows you to earn credits while studying topics of personal interest.	4.86	4.81	4.8
2	Taking micro-credit courses increases my motivation to learn.	4.81	4.70	4.52
3	Taking micro-credit courses helps broaden my learning scope and increases diversity.	4.9	4.78	4.5
4	The flexible schedule of micro-credit courses enhances my willingness to learn.	4.81	4.78	4.54
5	Overall, micro-credit courses have had a positive impact on my learning outcomes.	4.86	4.74	4.4
Subtotal		4.85	4.76	4.63
Total		23	28	27
Overall Average			4.75	



**Table 4**  
*Summary of Student Feedback*

Category	Subcategory	Specific Feedback
Course Experience and Learning Outcomes	Clam Digging Activity	"Digging for clams was a unique experience, and I felt a great sense of accomplishment after finding some." (Satisfaction Survey - 2023-5-6), "The clam digging part was really fun, especially since we got to take some home." (Learning Effectiveness Survey - 2023-5-6), "This was my first time clam digging, and I not only learned something new but was thrilled to actually dig up clams myself." (Community Awareness Survey - 2023-10-20)
	Sustainable Actions	"Clearing marine debris from the oyster farm was meaningful as I felt I was contributing to our land's wellbeing." (Learning Effectiveness Survey - 2024-3-30), "I really enjoyed helping to clear the wooden debris from the beach; it felt like I was doing something good for the environment, which was very satisfying." (Satisfaction Survey - 2023-5-6), "Participating in the marine debris cleanup not only taught me the importance of environmental protection but also made me feel like I did something beneficial for the environment, which made me feel good." (Community Awareness Survey - 2023-10-20)
	Tai Sheng Temple Guided Tour	"I really enjoyed listening to the elder explain the history at Tai Sheng Temple, especially since the entire tour was conducted in Taiwanese, which was very exciting!" (Learning Effectiveness Survey - 2024-3-30), "The guided tour at Tai Sheng Temple was fascinating, especially the use of Taiwanese, which gave me a deeper understanding of the local history and culture." (Satisfaction Survey - 2023-5-6), "The cultural explanation at Tai Sheng Temple helped me understand the history and beliefs of the area, which was very worthwhile." (Community Awareness Survey - 2024-3-30)
Course Arrangement and Suggestions	Course Arrangement	"When the weather is hot, I hope there will be more shaded areas or adjustments to the activity schedule." (Community Awareness Survey - 2023-10-20), "I hope there will be more break time during the activities, especially when it's hot." (Learning Effectiveness Survey - 2024-3-30), "The weather was too hot; I hope for more shaded areas." (Satisfaction Survey - 2023-5-6), "When it's hot, consider shortening the outdoor activities." (Satisfaction Survey - 2023-5-6), "Outdoor activities could be scheduled during cooler times of the day for a better experience." (Learning Effectiveness Survey - 2023-3-30)
	Suggestions for Extending Activity Time	"The free time at the beach was too short; I wish we could have stayed longer." (Learning Effectiveness Survey - 2024-3-30), "The beach is so beautiful; I hope to spend more time there next time." (Satisfaction Survey - 10-20)
	Language Comprehension Difficulties	"The guided tour at Tai Sheng Temple was interesting, but since it was all in Taiwanese, I didn't understand some parts." (Learning Effectiveness Survey - 2024-3-30)
Rural Life Experience and Resident Interaction	Fishing Village Life Experience and Resident Interaction	"I've lived in the city all my life, and coming to Chiayi for school, I thought rural life would be boring, but today's course made me realize Chiayi is a very interesting place." (Satisfaction Survey - 2023-10-20), "During free exploration, I chatted with an elderly lady digging for oysters and an old man praying at the temple. Their lives seemed so different from mine, and I learned a lot." (Satisfaction Survey - 2023-5-6)
Willingness to Continue Participation	Willingness to Continue Participation	"Is there a chance to work here during the summer? I want to experience more of the community life." (Satisfaction Survey - 2023-5-6)

**Table 5**  
*Feedback from Community Partners*

Category	Feedback
Feedback on Course Design and Content	"This time, it's different from the usual tourist groups that just come to take pictures of our 3D murals and then leave. They visited our forest, beach, and temple, and even talked with our elders in the village. This is a very good arrangement." (Field Notes-2023-5-6-Partner One). "It's great that students could participate in the beach protection work we've been doing for nearly ten years, letting them experience the hard work and significance of it." (Field Notes-2023-5-6-Business Partner One). "Our windbreak forest is beautiful and closely connected to our lives. It was good that a forestry graduate student explained it, but the content was very technical. I wonder if it was too difficult for everyone to understand?" (Field Notes-2023-5-6-Partner Two).
Feedback on Course Implementation	"Some students didn't seem interested in the experiential and exploratory parts of the course, like the community, forest, beach, and clam digging. Most of them just stayed in one place and watched, not really wanting to participate. I think it was because it was too hot?" (Field Notes-2023-10-20-Partner Two). "It was really hot, and the water we brought and the extra water we provided were all used up at the outdoor locations. We should set up more water stations and provide more water." (Field Notes-2023-10-20-Partner One).
Feedback on the Collaboration Experience	"You respected our customs and beliefs, and we could discuss our suggestions. This is very different from what we originally thought of universities, and it has been a very pleasant collaboration." (Field Notes-2023-10-20-Partner Two). "It's great that we got to be the guides, but some of us have experience, and some don't. We also don't know what the students like to hear, and we're unsure if what we're saying is correct. We hope we can receive more training." (Field Notes-2023-5-6-Partner One).

Received: *October 25, 2024* Revised: *November 19, 2024* Accepted: *December 18, 2024*

Cite as: Huang, C.-K. (2024). The practice of university social responsibility and general education: Promoting community collaboration and student engagement through micro-courses. *Problems of Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 82(6A), 1009–1028. <https://doi.org/10.33225/pec/24.82.1009>

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