

# Service-Learning in the recognition and revalorization of women as informants in the music of oral tradition through the revitalization of the repertoires

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**Abstract**— *In the field of Intangible Musical Heritage, women contributions have been underestimated. Culture is one of the key areas to raise gender awareness. In the framework of the Service-Learning initiative at University of Salamanca, we present a teaching innovation project aimed to raised students social conscience and gender awareness, and to revitalize the memory of elderly women and enhance the value of their experiences in the field of musical heritage, while promoting their positive self-perception.*

**Keywords**— *gender empowerment, equity, elderly, cultural heritage, service learning*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Equal opportunities for women and men should be one of the transversal objectives for the university in our labor to help to build an equal society. In our opinion the service-learning program in the University of Salamanca is a perfect framework for the promotion of gender awareness. For this reason, from the GIR IHMAGINE (Intangible Heritage Music and Gender International Networks) we proposed an active learning initiative who has been useful in both objectives: the recognition and revaluation of the role of women in cultural heritage and the quality teaching with social commitment.

“Gender aspects are relevant both in relation to the broad definition of culture as a ‘social construction’ and to the way in which cultural policy is designed and implemented” [1]. Furthermore, gender equality is a priority for UNESCO in the promotion of works on heritage, creativity and cultural diversity [2].

A gender-sensitive evaluation of the Spanish Musical Intangible Heritage and Folk Archives [3] and to the primary sources compiled by our research group [4] identifies substantial inequalities in the consideration of the roles of men and women in the processes of creation, transmission, and reception of popular music. This discrimination reinforces the gender stereotyping and prejudice. Our project was aimed to contribute to fight the invisibilización of women activities and female leading performance.

Since gender should not be understood as an isolated category but should always be analyzed within the context of other social power relations, age becomes another relevant aspect in our proposal. Older women constitute a disadvantaged group within our community.

That’s why this teaching innovation project has aimed to take a step forward in Service-Learning. According to Sigmon, service-learning “occurs when there is a balance between learning goals and service outcomes” [5].

Our goal followed the statement of Sigmon: “In these programs the service and the learning are balanced and the hyphen is essential. The defined needs/requests of individuals, communities, or agencies are linked to defined learning expectations for students. In a service-learning approach, all parties to the arrangement are seen as learners and teachers as well as servers and served. In these programs, we are challenged to respect local situations for what they can teach. Likewise, students are challenged to be their best, to listen, to explore, to learn, to share from their emerging capacities, and gain increased capacity for self-directed learning” [6].

Women’s contribution to Musical heritage is often underestimated due to the social norms and expectations placed in female roles, especially for the elderly. That’s why the reconstruction of older women participation in musical processes in the past present a specific challenge, which we want to contribute to address.

Within the framework of University of Salamanca specific strategic actions for quality teaching with social commitment [7][8], we developed the Teaching Innovation project ID2020/131, entitled "Sing to me! Informant and forgotten women: oral sources for an innovation program aimed at students of the master’s degree in Hispanic Music, the bachelor’s degree in History and Sciences of Music and the doctorate in History of Art and Musicology.", from the month of October 2020 to May 2021.

Our paper is divided into the following sections: the context of the experience, the methodology applied, the actions developed and some concluding remarks.

## II. CONTEXT

Our project combined teaching and research-transfer with a gender perspective in the circumstances derived from the COVID-19 social pandemic [9]. The proposed research methodology should have been adapted to the social conditions, so we decided to work with research materials provided by previous projects to prepare the students and work in the social awareness from a gender angle.

On the basis of previous research carried out from the GIR IHMAGINE [10] we were able to locate several women informants in the age range from 80 to 97 years old. These

women acted as promoters of popular culture in their professional careers. They worked as teachers in rural public schools (Sierra de los Ancares, Sierra de Francia) and in deprived urban areas (as Pozo del Tío Raimundo in Madrid; Pizarrales, Prosperidad o Vidal in Salamanca). These primary teachers studied musical education in the 1940's with Aníbal Sánchez Fraile, famous organist, composer and ethnomusicologist. Another group of women work in the service sector (Post and Telegraphs and Provincial Hospital of Salamanca), defying their environment pressures for leaving their home to work outside. This group of women used the popular musical repertoire of oral tradition as work songs in the exercise of their profession. But their role as cultural promoters have not been valued because their age, gender and the social consideration of the fascist union of the Women's Section (Sección Femenina) during the Franco's dictatorship.

The appropriated contextualization of these factors was part of the learning process for our students. They were asked to compile their memories and life stories, so that they could historically contextualize their actions and analyze the role they have played.

These women have been chosen because they belong to a close group with a medical and physical condition that isolates them from what was their usual environment; this social vulnerability has worsened by the pandemic.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This innovation project integrated students of Intangible Musical Heritage through the research technic of semi-structured interviews with elderly women informants. Due to the condition of the school year 2020-2021, the number of participants was reduced to eight, six female and two male students.

The theoretical and practical classes were offered as a Specialized Training Activity [11], entitled "Methodological Seminar in Ethnomusicology and Innovation through the technique of the interview with elderly women informants", aimed at graduated and postgraduate students in Intangible Heritage of the University of Salamanca. Nine professors and researchers participated in the seminar. The Seminar was both presential and digital through Google Meet.

The GIR provided the digital field recordings made with elderly women from competitive projects in the years 1993-1999 of the Governing Council of Castile-Leon to be used as primary source material for obtaining qualitative data.

The GIR researchers acted like mentors to the students, guiding them through the interview content analysis.

The students elaborated and recorded their own informative capsules in the Innovation and Digital Production Service of the USAL; each session was coordinated by a member of the GIR IHMAGINE.

This practice was not only an excellent exercise but also an innovative use of the resources and services of the University of Salamanca available to teachers and students. Finally, it provided gender aware material for the GIR Intangible Musical Heritage Archive.

### IV. ACTIONS

The main objective of this initiative was the recognition and revaluation of the role of women both in the present and

in the past in shaping the music of oral tradition through the revitalization of gender repertoires.

The specific objectives to achieve this general were the following:

1. To raise gender awareness, enhancing this old generation of women participation in traditional music repertoires through the analysis of the recording of their musical history lives.

2. To provide a quality teaching with social commitment through the specific methodological training in designing and applying oral sources, particularly semi-structured interviews.

3. To carry out efficiently the teaching practices of these Intangible Heritage subjects and improve the quality of the didactic materials used.

4. To elaborate and record students' informative capsules in the Innovation and Digital Production Service of the USAL

The actions carried out, in relation to the proposed objectives, focused on the assessment of the active participation of students, (i.e.) how they planned their participation in the project, how they assumed their roles, how they performed the appropriate tasks to respond to the real need to be solved, how they organized the reflection and evaluation sessions and how responsible they were in their contribution to the community.

Specifically, they were positively assessed on the following items:

- the elaboration of their semi-structured interview, according to the possible informants assigned by the GIR and selected by each student.

- the realization of the field work,

- the analysis of the data obtained,

- the synthesis capacity of each student to outline the script of the informative capsule,

- the preparation and rehearsal of their oral speech for the recording of the capsule in the allotted time.

### V. CONCLUSIONS

This teaching innovation project has aimed to take a step forward in Service-Learning from a gender perspective, since the use of this methodology allows one of the great challenges of today's University, the linking of its three missions: teaching, research and university social responsibility in its ethical dimension. The conclusions we have obtained can be synthesized in four points.

This activity has promoted a conscious citizenship with a gender perspective, facilitating the relationship between theory and practice and providing social and ethical sense to the learning that undergraduate and graduate students from the participant courses. The promotion of the active engagement of the student in the university city in this course 2020-2021 have been achieved through his project since it has encouraged the creation of interdisciplinary teaching teams and favored the teaching role of guide or facilitator of learning promoted by the EHEA. finally, it has facilitated the training and evaluation by competencies of these undergraduate and postgraduate subjects.

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The realization of the informative capsules provides materials to a gender aware archive of Musical Intangible Heritage.

The work with vulnerable protagonist due to their gender and age contributes to their empowerment since it has made possible for the informants interviewed to transfer, through the research of others, their history and memory, encouraging a positive self-perception.

This teaching innovation project has been an effective learning result, since it has increased the capacity of the students who participated to make reflections of an ethical nature in their field of study with a gender perspective.

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