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Transmedia as a Strategy:
Critical and Technical Expertise
for Today's Media Galaxy

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Transmedia Narratives of Social Intervention: Affecting Reflexiveness in the Communicative Phenomenon as a Key Competence in Education

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ABSTRACT – Highlighting the educational grounds of transmedia frameworks, this article acknowledges the positive impact of multimedia technology in academic achievement and focuses on the examination of the reflexivity in the communicative phenomenon as a key competence in education. In the search for a deeper understanding of the role that transmedia formats can play in both teaching and learning, the theoretical and conceptual ground for the analysis will follow the premises of the new field called TPACK (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) and the well-known Seven Elements of Digital Storytelling. Moreover, a cognitive approach to narrative will be introduced to delineate the reflexivity of the affection in linguistic and cognitive parameters.

KEYWORDS – critical thinking competence, Design for Change (DFC), European higher education, transmedia narratives.

The concrete case study that will be considered is an innovative project called “Transmedia Stories of Social Intervention” from the Complutense University Research Group SIIM (Studies on Intermediality and Intercultural Mediation). This Project designs Transmedia activities in order to meet the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) requirements of competence-based curricula. The methodology that will be used is Design for Change, a divergent thinking that promotes teamwork to put critical thinking, problem-solving and empathy at the service of co-creative participatory media culture. As it will be shown, as learning outcomes, transmedia narratives are not just designed to teach and evaluate key competences and transversal skills in a more creative and innovative way but, above all, they seek to turn students into agents of social change,

i.e. future professionals at the service of their communities. The examples lay therefore at the intersection between artistic creation, a critical mindset and social responsibility while helping students to interrogate how transmedia narratives can drive social change and visually articulate good stories with the emotional force to clutch our imagination and makes us feel so strongly, that not only meaning is embedded in our memory but it draws us to take action.

1. INTRODUCTION

To some extent, transmedia storytelling is the modern expression of the ancient art of storytelling. Indeed, narratives and the act of telling stories can be claimed to be an intrinsic fabric of human communication and expression. Limited to a written format until the Internet and digital revolution, the inter-medial hybridization of hypertext (Landow 1997) has made possible the transfer of multimedia content into the very narrative of the stories. Customized and personalized in unprecedented ways, new technologies facilitate transmedia stories which cluster around recorded audio, photos, video clips, animation, blog posts and bookmarks which overlap across multiple media platforms and multimedia delivery channels creating a unified and cognitive experience.

In recent decades, transmedia storytelling has emerged as a powerful tool in teaching and learning with the potential to engage both teachers and students. To these means, it is important to bear in mind that integrating technology is much more than integrating software in the dynamic of teaching. Indeed, defenders of instructional technologies in educational settings urge a swift move from the debate on technologies themselves to the ways “technology can be used to bring out the very best in how teachers teach and how students learn” (Robin 2008, 221).

Highlighting the educational grounds of multimedia frameworks, new approaches, such as TPCK (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge), feature the connections between content (subject-content), pedagogy (the teaching methodology) and technology, i.e. digital devices. Even though TPCK provides a solid ground for theory, ironically, educators and teaching communities have not reached a consensus over the effectiveness of technology in the classroom.

With that in mind and the celebration of transmedia studies’ coming of age, this paper discusses the theoretical and empirical foundation of the

use of transmedia narratives in higher education as a scholarly practice. In particular, it examines the potential of bringing the intercultural, critical and ethical perspectives to transmedia storytelling into higher education, in order to critically approach the educational dimension of the communicative phenomena in an ever-expanding transmedia universe of narratives which are not media specific. Looking for ways to meaningfully integrate intermedial formats in the classroom, the project that will be presented here as a case-study – “Transmedia Narratives of Social Intervention” – focuses on the examination of the reflexiveness in the communicative phenomenon as a key competence in education. In an attempt to search for the emotive magnitude of transmediality understood as a mix of expressive inter-art hybrid genres that are instructional and reflexive in nature, the project articulates cognitive parameters that combine both effect and cognition.

Embracing art and culture as a catalyst for change and as a source that drives innovation, the project questions the necessary skills and competences needed to create transmedia outputs which would trigger reflection, and creativity in transmediality. The call for collaborative methodologies in the design process of transmedia storytelling, such as the Design for Change methodology, allows one to critically approach the communicable dimension of instructional and educational transmedia by first interrogating what ‘critical approach’ means. In the interface between theory and practice we thus propose transmedia stories to instruct on the cognitive process that precedes the communicative phenomena.

2. TPCK AND THE SEVEN ELEMENTS OF DIGITAL STORYTELLING

In the thoughtful interweaving of three sources of knowledge – technology, pedagogy and knowledge – the term TPCK is a new field aimed at coupling technology with education. It has its origins in the earlier work of Schulman (1986), who stressed the pedagogical content of knowledge, known as PCK, and Pierson’s research (2001) on the relationship between teaching skills and technological skills. As Misrha and Koehler (2006) clarify, TPCK:

[It] is the basis of good teaching with technology and requires an understanding of the representation of concepts using technologies; pedagogical techniques used in constructive ways to teach content; knowledge of what makes con-

cepts difficult or easy to learn and how technology can help redress some of the problems students face; knowledge of student's prior knowledge and theories of epistemology; and knowledge on how technologies can be used to build on existing knowledge and develop new epistemologies or strengthen old ones. (cited in Robin 2008, 129)

In the particular case of "Transmedia Narratives of Social Intervention", the contents that are visually represented using technologies are critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and social responsibility; the pedagogy used in a constructive way is the Design for Change intervention, the methodology, rooted in the Design Thinking model; and the technology that will enable students to practice skills needed to create transmedia outputs is video editing software such as Movie Maker and After Effects. Thus, the TPCCK approach is made possible thanks to the proliferation of affordable hardware and software which help teachers to provide students with the competences they need "to thrive in increasingly media-varied environments" (Riesland 2005).

An effective point of departure to work with the necessary skills to create intermedial digital storytelling outputs is the so-called seven elements of digital storytelling (see also Robin 2008, 222-223). These seven elements support learning through the process of creating a story as students reflect upon what needs to be communicated (content), the most effective way to communicate (pedagogy) and in what format (technology). The seven elements are: (1) Point of view; (2) Dramatic question; (3) Emotional content; (4) The gift of your voice; (5) The power of the soundtrack; (6) Economy and (7) Pacing. They were introduced and disseminated by the well-known Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS 2005), a non-profit, community art organization cofounded by Joe Lambert and Dana Atchley back in the 1980s in Berkeley, California. CDS original objective was to provide affordable training and assistance to people who were interested in creating and sharing their own personal stories with the use of technology.

Ranging from entertainment to instructional purposes, these elements are useful to move from the abstraction stage to the experiential and testimonial articulation of a story (Andrews, Hull, and Donahue 2009, 7) From the digital to the intermedial, at its core, transmedia storytelling allows users to become creative storytellers through the selection of topics, research, writing scripts and by developing, a story combined with various types of multimedia, such as recorder video, music hypertext and video clips. The fact that multimedia can be inserted in the storytelling, has brought unprecedented changes. We are witnessing a drastic change in the reception and

consumption of knowledge since technology consumers are no longer just “information-gathering but information-creating as well” (Robin 2008, 221). In this context, the development of critical thinking and problem-solving competence is fundamentally related to the ability to create and innovate. Nevertheless, without the emotional content at the forefront of the narration, information would be just rationally encapsulated, rather than felt.

For this reason, in the particular classroom environment of our project, these seven principles have been applied not only to make abstract or conceptual content more understandable, to facilitate discussion and enhance digital competence, but most importantly to engage students and make them reflect on current pressing problems in their community. That is, with these seven elements we ask students to interrogate how can transmedia narratives drive social change and how their abstract ideas can progressively be transformed into good story that inspires, captures our imagination and triggers empathy. Indeed, the ability to communicate meaningfully to a variety of audiences in multicultural contexts is one of the key features of 21st century skills that intermedial digital storytelling, as Robin points out in the figure below, has the potential to contribute to in the world of education (*Fig. 1*).



Figure 1. – Cited in Robin 2008, 226.

As we can see, overlapping multimedia platforms encapsulate multiple literacy skills, problem-solving being one of them. In addition, research such as that conducted by Burmark (2004) demonstrates that the blending of visual images with written formats heightens comprehension. With this in mind, the activity of transmedia narratives of social intervention has been designed to be a potential learning experience that helps Students to achieve 21st century skills.

According to educators (Brown, Bryan, and Brown 2005; Tucker 2006; Cambridge 2010), the 21st century skills that today's learners have to master in order to solidly transit from educational institutions to employment opportunities are: (a) digital literacy; (b) global literacy, understood as the ability to provide a global perspective to knowledge; (c) technology literacy, as the ability to use technology for learning purposes; (d) visual literacy, considered as the ability to evaluate reliable information (Robin 2008, 221). In this line, the new shift that our project proposes is to systematize transmedia storytelling not just as a strategy for teaching curricular content and transmedia outputs but as an objective learning outcome that helps teachers measure the competences and skills students achieve, while enhancing creativity and empathy and persuading audiences to take action.

Certainly, as we will further discuss in the methodology section, it is through the active participation of students in the creation process of the transmedia narrative, that is, in the learning by doing, know-how approach to learning, that the attainment of the competences and skills can be more successfully and meaningfully achieved (Hicks 2006).

2.1. *Co-creative Participatory Media and the Cognitive Approach to Narrative*

As it has been conferred in previous sections, new media technologies facilitate the process of bringing stories to life and the fact that it is much more accessible to narrate and to persuade larger audiences allows for transmediality to progressively become a conceivable feature of participatory, popular culture (Jenkins 2006). In "Co-Creative Media: Theorizing Digital Storytelling as a Platform for Researching and Developing Participatory Culture" (Spurgeon *et al.* 2009) authors carefully articulate the term co-creative media as opposed to "spontaneous models of participatory media" on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, and explore intermedial digital storytelling as

a co-creative media practice to promote voice and inclusion (*ibid.*, 276) aimed at sparking social participation.

In this vein, our project embraces the operativity of transmediality in positive social interventions as a possibility for bridging participatory gaps in education (Tacchi and Kiran 2008), for empowering and for emboldening at the intersection of cognition and affection. As Monika Fludernik asserts in “Narratology in the Twenty-First Century: The Cognitive Approach to Narrative” (2010) emphasizing the imaginative and emotional possibilities of language implies the willingness to submit linguistics to cognitive explanations “showing how they are functionally efficient, evolve in ways that maximize their semantic effect and combine to achieve optimal communication” (*ibid.*, 925). Furthermore, cognitive narratology demonstrates “that readers do not see texts as *having* narrative features but read texts as *narrative* by imposing cognitive narrative frames on them” (*ibid.*, 926). So, there we can see that cognitive narratology delivers an “emotive turn” in the humanities, i.e. one that values emotions and empathy on artistic and literary representations.

Moreover, the ability to be empathetic to the societal challenges of contemporary times is contemplated within educational reforms as one of the skills to achieve within so-called civic competence, contemplated in all educational stages.

2.1.1.1. *Twenty-First Century Skills in European Higher Education Area (EHEA)*

As it has been previously pointed out, the rapid development of digital technologies and the increasing use of the Internet has brought unprecedented changes in the classroom dynamics and in the ways students learn and express themselves. Since the creation of EHEA in 2010, “digital competence” is one of the eight key competences reflected in competence-based European curricula. Thus, within EHEA, it is emphasized that learning is oriented to the acquisition of “competences” that will help students achieve personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment. Listed in the Reference Framework of the official *Journal of the European Union*, eight key competences are defined as a combination of “knowledge, skills and attitudes” that will enable successful insertion in a knowledge society. These competences are: (1) Communication in the mother tongue;

(2) Communication in foreign languages; (3) Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology; (4) Digital competence; (5) Learning to learn; (6) Social and civic competences; (7) Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; (8) Cultural awareness and expression. In addition, EHEA also contemplates so-called “horizontal or transversal competences” considered equally important in the process of mastering all the other competences. These are: critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, initiative, risk assessment, decision taking, and constructive management of feelings. As it will be explained in the methodology section, the competences that transmedia narratives will work, three key competences and two transversal ones (thinking skills-problem-solving), undoubtedly are at the core of successful learning outcomes in the framework of EHEA-Degrees.

Pedagogically speaking, EHEA advocates for a student-centered learning (SCL) approach. SCL implies a substantial methodological transformation in the classroom dynamics since students, traditionally passive conveyors of information, must now play an active role to fulfil continuous assessment requirements. To do so, the SCL approach focuses on students’ needs rather than teachers’ input. Subsequently, the role of the teacher is no longer that of a lecturer or a transmitter of information but rather a guide and facilitator of knowledge, making sure students acquire the necessary competences that will enable their successful insertion into 21st century job market.

In the particular case of Spain, in spite of the fact that the concept of “critical thinking” and interpersonal skills appear in the official curricula of early childhood education, primary and secondary schools, and in the teaching guides of university degrees and official master’s degrees to date, there is no institutional agreement on how to define or how to teach this competence. To exemplify this claim, in chapter 5 “The User/Learner’s Competences” of the aforementioned Common European Framework of Reference for Language¹ here is no rubric to measure and evaluate “civic competence” nor “thinking skills”.

As professors teaching in EHEA, incorporating competence-based activities and a SCL approach has many implications for the design and flexibility of the curriculum, course content and interactivity of the learning process, especially when it comes to establishing clear learning outcomes that would reflect the acquisition of these competences. In order for creative and innovative ways to incorporate a SCL approach so as to achieve the aforemen-

¹ <https://rm.coe.int/1680697848>.

tioned competences, the innovation project presented here acknowledges the demand to ensure that students develop competences in an active way, being themselves at the center of their own learning process.

3. CASE STUDY: TRANSMEDIA NARRATIVES OF SOCIAL INTERVENTION AS LEARNING OUTCOMES

As professors working within the realms of the new EHEA framework, our starting point for this innovation project was to question how multimedia technology could help foster competences such as critical thinking, problem-solving and social responsibility. Moreover, we interrogated in which way digital formats could assist in actively co-creating and engaging university students in contemporary debates while promoting the common good from their specific field of study.

Framed within the European Commission project “A New Narrative for Europe”, transmedia narratives of social intervention responds to the need to bring Europe closer to its younger citizens and revive a “European” spirit via the arts and sciences. In an unprecedented crisis of identity and values, the “New Narrative for Europe”, defines Europe as a mental state and a moral and political responsibility shared by European citizens, united in its diversity, by common values such as respect for democratic values and a culture of peace. It also emphasizes the need for educational institutions to promote these values among students. Hence, the main objective of transmedia narratives is to contribute to help shape a new narrative for Europe providing the specific vision of university students and involving them actively in rethinking and expressing their own moods with respect to the main problems they identify in the Europe of today.

From the point of view of their future professions working in a European context, students are asked to identify a problem in Europe that bothers them deeply and to visually articulate their state of mind and feelings based on fact-objective evidence coming from credible sources of information. In a collaborative way and from a contrasted opinion standpoint, students must visually transmit through short videos, a proposal of social undertaking to tackle such problem, by relying on the specific knowledge from their field of studies. Their short videos (3-5 min.) are explored as examples of transmedia narratives of social intervention.

Delving into the operativity of transmediality, in a concoction of critical and technical expertise, students develop problem-solving skills by identifying a challenge in their communities that moves them so personally that urges them to take action and forces them to reflectively articulate a creative solution to this problem in a message for participatory change.

Reflexiveness on the communicative phenomenon in order to persuade about creative solutions and active engagement can help students to progress from lower-order thinking to higher-order thinking as they learn to conduct research on a topic, ask questions, organize their ideas, express contrasted opinions and construct meaningful narratives. Through an instructional presentation that informs viewers and awakens empathy, students learn what to “critically” express and interrogate means. To do so, students must achieve competence 2 (communication in foreign languages, in this case, English) in conjunction with competences 4 (digital competence) and competence 6 (social and civic competences, i.e. social responsibility). In addition, students acquire the transversal competences: critical thinking (contrasted opinion) and problem-solving skills.

At this point, we would like to clarify that when we talk about *ethics in* the specific context of European multicultural societies, we refer to the commitment to human values based on respect and tolerance towards others, equality and respect for human rights, values that the *Treaty of Lisbon* and the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union* state. With regards to the concept of *social responsibility*, the aim is to awaken commitments at all social levels, placing students at the epicenter of the future of their communities, in search of the common good, democratic values and a culture of peace, regardless of their future professions. Transmedia narratives here presented seek therefore to promote common good within a current context of European crisis of identity and values, developing a sense of service to their communities, a commitment to social responsibility, regardless of students’ future professions.

As it will be explained in the next section, to promote active participation of students in an innovative way, Design for Change methodology has been tested. It is a methodology that promotes divergent thinking and active citizenship by working on empathy, critical thinking, problem-solving skills and teamwork and joint effort.

3.1. *Methodology*

Participants: 200 students (80 students from 1st year and 120 students from 2nd year). Degrees: Fine Arts and Design. This innovative project has been implemented in the second term of the academic year 2017-2018 and carried out with first- and second-year students enrolled in the Fine Arts and Design degree at Francisco de Victory University of Madrid, Spain.

To achieve communicative competence in a foreign language, students must clearly formulate purposes and aims. From that, eight open questions were given to students as a structure for the video script. The questions to be collaboratively answered were: (1) What area of your community bothers you most? (2) What specific aspect would you like to find a better solution to? (3) What is your target group? (4) What are the reasons you would give to find a solution to the problem? (5) What methodology would you use? (6) What is your main objective? (7) What is the viability of the project? (8) What is the expected “positive social impact”?

With questions 1 and 2 students describe why they consider it necessary to implement their proposal concerning the problem that hurts them deeply; through question 3, students make explicit the social group to which this participatory proposal is addressed. The rest of the questions from 4 to 8 explain the methodology to be used, the objectives pursued, the evidences of the viability of the project and its positive social impact in the search for the common good within the context of a changing Europe.

In regard to the digital competence, technology supports the visual articulation and instructional presentation of a previous problem-solving process in which students collaboratively practice 21st century skills and progress from lower-order thinking to higher-order thinking as they first brainstorm ideas, agree on the selection of a problem, conduct research to express contrasted opinions to finally organize and synthesize their ideas to construct meaningful transmedia narratives that stimulate social change in a participatory manner.

Halfway between the communicative and digital competence, the seven elements of digital storytelling are explained. Emphasizing not only the critical mindset underlying semantic structures but the emotional dimension in the ordering and presentation of the information, the seven elements acts as an attention-focusing mechanism in the overlapping of multimedia platforms that supports transmedia narrative expressions (Gerrig 1993, cited in Andrews, Hull, and Donahue 2009, 7). The learning outcome is a 3-5-minute

video in which students visually narrate a creative solution to the problem in their community that they have identified (with back up evidence from reliable sources) as the one that hurts them the most.

3.1.1.1. *Design for Change Methodology*

In order to trigger a participatory response, a story must not just inform, it must inspire. And people are never inspired by reason alone (Adamson *et al.* 2006, 37). This is why the “just tell them” technique usually fails, because it totally overlooks the roles that emotion and meaning play in any life-altering action (*ibid.*). At the junction between cognition and affection, Design for Change, inspired by Design Thinking strategies, empowers students to become agents of social transformation by designing projects in response to the real challenges of their European communities.

Design for Change (DFC) is a global movement that aims to empower students to say, “I can” and inspire others by telling their own stories of change. The program promotes design process as a way for encouraging students to create and develop solutions for change in their communities and to put those ideas into action. Aimed at fostering co-creative participatory culture stemming from educational settings, it encourages students not just to observe the world from their comfort zones but to meet challenges, to make noise and be the seeds of change within their communities. With the objective to transform an aspect of their environment that they want to improve, a simplified process of Design Thinking is applied to walk students through its four stages (*Fig. 2*).



Figure 2. – Design for Change steps (source: <http://www.dfcpain.com>).

In the first stage of *Figure 2*, the “feel” phase, students are asked not to think but to *feel* which problems in their communities bother them and hurt them deeply. Using the whiteboard as a mind-map, our role as teachers is to monitor the brainstorming of ideas during which every student must write down in English two problems on a post-it and share it loud in front of their classmates. The use of post-its is a very important part of the SCL approach since it is a way in which all students’ voices can be heard in the classroom. Furthermore, it is a process of convergence-divergence-synthesis to move from the individual post-it (where the ideas have been pointed in clouds) to the group conversation. Out of the different proposals, thematic areas are grouped, and students are encouraged to join in teams with people who share their own visions and “feel for” the same problems, rather than just join a group based on class affinities or friendships.

In a second stage, in the ‘imagine’ step, students now in groups of 4-5, must creatively imagine a way to improve the situation, and come up with a solution to the problem they have chosen to tackle. It is in this phase that they collaboratively develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills through the open questions provided in the activity-instructions. These questions must be answered providing a contrasted opinion, that is, by giving objective and justified reasons based on credible and reliable sources of information.

In the third step, students must ‘do’ the act of change that in this case is to ‘make’ a short 3-5-minute video with a creative solution for solving the problem and thus promote common good in their communities. The only condition is that they must apply their specific knowledge from their degrees/field of study, and future professions, which in this case is Fine Arts and Design.

Finally, in the last phase, the ‘share’ stage, aimed at inspiring others into action, students are expected to present their proposal in class by projecting the video they have made. In order to reach larger audiences, students have obtained the authorization to make it public and therefore reach as many people as possible. Placing them at the center of their own learning (by letting them decide by themselves which problems they would like to find a solution to) and demanding active participation from all group members, the cognitive approach to the communicative practice is intended to turn students into active agents of social change; future professionals at the service of their communities (social responsibility).

4. RESULTS: TRANSMEDIA NARRATIVES AS PARTICIPATORY MEDIA TO PROMOTE COMMON GOOD

Searching for ways to ensure a SCL approach and active participation of students, the implementation of the Design for Change methodology has proven to be stimulating and motivating for students, while working with curricular content. It helps envision solutions to real life problems depending on the student's own disciplines and reinforce empathy towards the problems of the world while empowering students as agents of social transformation in a wide variety of social problems.

Out of 200 students, especially those from first year, there have been similar problems they have empathised with. Indeed, among the 120 students from first year, the areas of their communities they felt more strongly about were: animal abuse (4 groups); lack of respect, ethics and empathy (3 groups); social inequality (3 groups); need to improve education (2 groups); pollution and chemicals (2 groups); negative effects of social media (2 groups) and bullying in educational settings (2 groups).

In the case of the 80 students from second year, even though there was no iterating topic, the problems they felt strongly about were also driven by a lack of ethics and values.

The areas students have chosen are gender inequality; overuse of plastic; cultural diversity; lack of creativity; creative use of abandoned spaces in the city; endangered species; use of animals in the fashion industry, racism, homophobia and healthy eating habits.

As students of Fine Art and Design, they have proposed social entrepreneurship initiatives in which art and design provide a creative solution to the problem. In addition to a practical approach their transmedia narratives are also intended to raise awareness of specific target groups or/and society at large.

Consequently, by intersecting communicative, digital and civic competences, transmedia narratives have a twofold potential. On the one hand, they constitute learning outcomes where the degree of acquisition of competences (either key or transversal) can be measured in a comprehensive and clear way. On the other hand, they can be explored as examples of what in our research group SIIM we call "strategic storytelling", testimonial intermedial stories aimed at promoting common good and achieving a positive social impact by creatively imagining solutions to real life problems from students' field of study.

Having given consent to make their transmedia narratives public, they are on display on our project website².

4.1. *Development of Competences*

In terms of the achievement of key competences through the transmedia narratives activity, in Communication in foreign languages the degree of improvement in written and oral skills – by providing written answers to the open questions for the video script and visually narrating their proposal on multimedia platforms such as Movie Marker and After Effects – have successfully been measured. With question 1, What area of your community bothers you most?, students have practiced “raising awareness” towards a social problem in their communities; with question 2, What specific aspect would you like to find a better solution to?, students have detected problems providing contrasted evidence that supports the dimension of the problem chosen; with question 3, What is your target group?, students have determined the profile of their viewers; with question 4, What are the reasons you would give to find a solution to the problem?, students had to provide reasoned and convincing arguments; with question 5, What methodology would you use?, students have collaboratively planned their intervention; with question 6, What is your main objective?, students have set goals; with question 7, What is the viability of the project?, students have assessed possible outcomes and finally, with question 8, What is the expected “positive social impact”?, students have predicted positive social outcomes.

On the other hand, the Digital competence has been evaluated through the process of contrasted research and by students shooting and editing process of their transmedia narratives in a 3-5-minute video format. Furthermore, in relation to Social and civic competence the degree of empathy towards a growing problem in their communities has been evaluated. This has entailed critical and creative reflection and constructive participation in the community, which are the skills that this competence involves. As a result, students have engaged adequately in displaying solidarity and interest in solving prob-

² <https://www.ucm.es/siim/transmedia-social-intervention>. Here are some examples: transmedia stories against overuse of plastic – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGH_VixT32o; transmedia stories against gender violence – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRMdt1yjomI>.

lems affecting the local and wider community providing the specific expertise from their field of studies.

In addition, in the framework of 21st century skills, the most important gains pertain to consolidating higher-order thinking. In particular, problem-solving skills have been practiced through a reflective communicative phenomenon that involved linguistic strategies to synthesize, analyse, evaluate and present information in a persuading and participatory tone. Accordingly, transmedia outputs in the form of 3-5-minute videos document the learner's reflection on the process of co-creating multimedia meaning that calls for participatory culture. In this vein, it can be claimed that through these transmedia narratives students "learn to convert data into information and transform information into knowledge" (Cradler *et al.* 2002, 3, cited in Robin 2008, 225). And this knowledge embraces both cognition and affection.

With insistence on democratic values and social intervention, adding to the entertainment dimension, the ethical and instructional value of storytelling unfolds. Indeed, it is at the intersection between media convergence and user-generated content that this innovation project highlights the relationship between critical thinking, problem-solving and social responsibility. Exploring short videos as a new form of communication and expression among young students, transmedia narratives offer a way to reconcile communication competence in a foreign language with creative expression, critical thinking (contrasted opinion, problem-solving skills applying their specific field of knowledge) and civic engagement (developing empathy, solidarity and interest in solving problems affecting the local and wider community).

In our Research Group SIIM-UCM, we believe that academic excellence must go hand in hand with excellence in humanity, so that our students graduate in passion and compassion, not only in scientific knowledge.

5. CONCLUSION

Beyond its conceptual characteristics, "Transmedia Narratives of Social Intervention" explores the operativity of transmediality not just as a strategy for better teaching transmedia phenomena but as a potential learning outcome to help achieve key competences in higher education. Blending critical and

technical dexterity, the transmedia narratives presented here are approached as strategic narrative structures operating in intermedial connective environments with the aim at contributing to the achievement of critical thinking, problem-solving, communicative and civic competences in a transdisciplinary way, while generating a positive social impact. To these means, the objective of transmediality is to deepen the link between academic learning and civic engagement at the service of solutions to real life problems

As we have seen, transmedia narratives examine the reflexiveness in the communication phenomenon as a key competence in education. In its operativity as an educational tool, it successfully addresses the challenges and needs of a competence-based curriculum since it embodies the synthesis of 21st century skills with an emphasis on creativity and artistic forms as promoters of participatory media. Correspondingly, transmedia narratives, as emerging forms of communication and expression among young people, have proven to be successfully converted into measurable learning outcomes able to assess the degree of acquisition of competences and transmedia skills.

As a result, multimedia technology not only facilitates the acquisition of thinking and problem-solving abilities, but it enables the creation of transmedia storytelling that triggers critical thinking and humanity. Visually narrating a social entrepreneurship proposal, transmedia narratives become a vehicle to bringing awareness towards social responsibility in which the best of students' future professions is offered at the service and wellbeing of their communities. Intended to provide a general overview and provoke interest in further research, this paper hence supports transmedia narratives as effective transferable skills in highly mediated multimedia contexts. Furthermore, advocates for transmediality as a teaching tool are able to crystalize common values and beliefs and strengthen a sense of community.

In short, the examples of transmedia stories presented here navigate between artistic creation, a critical mindset and social responsibility in university students, while helping them to interrogate how transmedia narratives can drive social change and visually articulate good stories with the emotional force to clutch our imagination and make us feel so strongly, that not only meaning is inserted in our memories but it draws us to take action.

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